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WITH LEGO BABY GROOT

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GOING BEYOND PLAY

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FOR **STAR WARS**?

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# Blocks

ISSUE 93 // 2022

## MEET THE TEAM



### EDITOR // GRAHAM HANCOCK

A LEGO expert who can't remember life without the brick, Graham loves using that knowledge to bring Blocks to the shelf every single month.



### BUILD EXPERT AND HISTORIAN // DANIEL KONSTANSKI

Lifelong LEGO obsessive passionate about collecting. With a thorough knowledge of LEGO over the years, he is Blocks' historian.



### BUILD SPECIALIST // SIMON PICKARD

Our experienced MOC expert who is a regular on the show circuit. If there's a way to build it, then he can show you how.



### PHOTOGRAPHER // PHIL WRIGHTON

Models never look better than when this prize winning LEGO photographer has worked his magic to produce beautiful Blocks covers.



### REVIEWS WRITER // KAT-REES JAUKE

Kat uses her LEGO knowledge to cast a discerning eye over the latest sets to see if they are satisfying to build and look impressive on display.



### REVIEWS WRITER // DAVE CARTLIDGE

Whether it's from Marvel Super Heroes, Friends, Technic or any other theme, Dave has the LEGO know-how to assess the latest sets.

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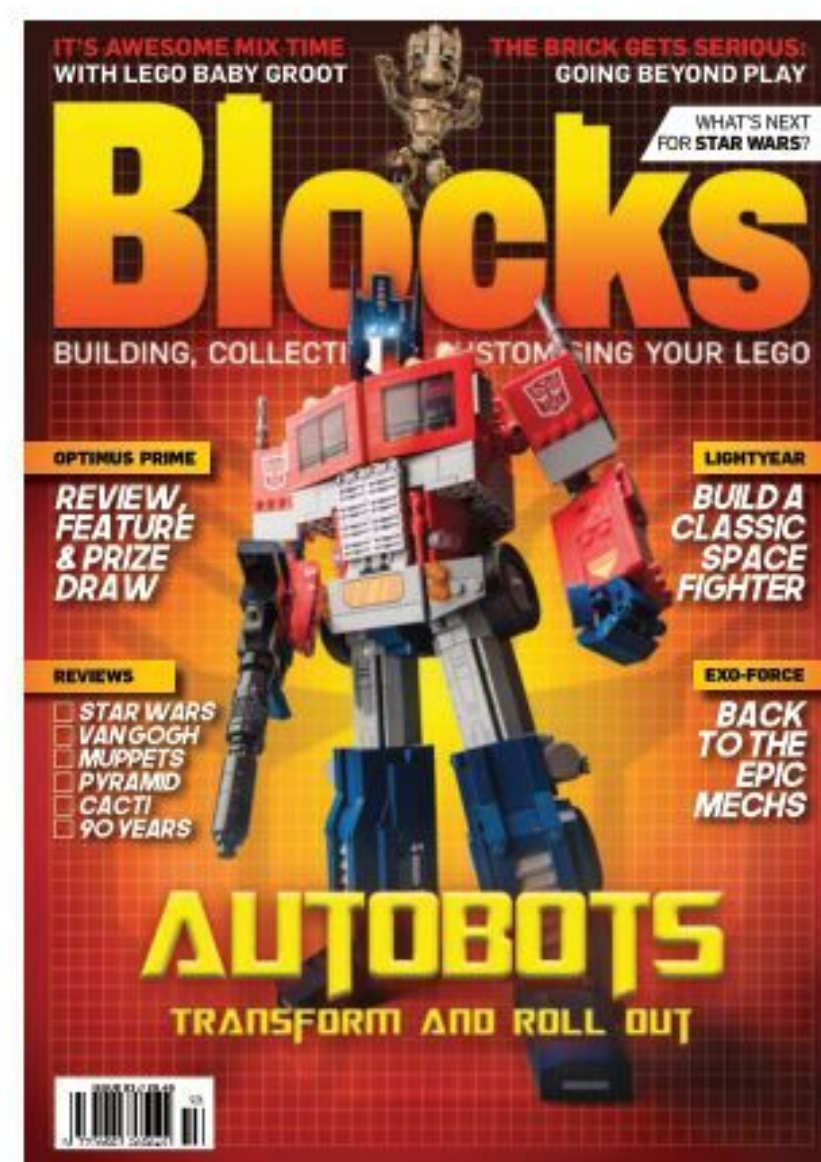
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# WELCOME



Cover Pic: Phil Wrighton

**ONE OF  
HASBRO'S  
MOST BELOVED  
CHARACTERS IS  
ACTUALLY NOW  
AVAILABLE AS A  
LEGO MODEL**

This is really happening, right? One of Hasbro's most beloved characters is actually now available as a LEGO model? Optimus Prime is on the cover of this magazine, yet I'm still struggling to quite believe this is real.

To help convince myself – and you, dear reader – that LEGO Transformers is now a thing, we are talking to the designers who worked on this special set. Model Designer Joseph Patrick Kyde used to work on Transformers at Hasbro, so has a great perspective on the process.

Fans of the right vintage for OG Optimus Prime might also have fond memories of Classic Space – and this month's Mod Squad shows how to take the recently released Lightyear 76832 XL-15 Spaceship and put that transparent yellow canopy to good use.

This all began when Ole Kirk Kristiansen started making toys instead of barns, so as part of our 90th anniversary coverage we share the full story of why and how he switched trades. You might know part of the tale, but we suspect there are some surprises in there for even the most knowledgeable LEGO history buff.

Just in case Optimus Prime doesn't provide enough mechanical action for you this month, Blockstalgia is revisiting EXO-FORCE, the theme that really kicked off the LEGO Group's love of mechs. Get reminded of the anime-inspired theme and marvel at what good value LEGO sets were in the 2000s.

Leg godt!

**Graham Hancock**

Editor // graham@blocksmag.com





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# WIN WIN WIN WIN WIN!

Subscribe to Blocks magazine today to be in with a chance of winning **LEGO TRANSFORMERS 10302 OPTIMUS PRIME**. You'll also be automatically entered into our monthly prize draws to win the latest and greatest LEGO sets. See **page 77** now!



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# LEGOtalk



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Rounding up the brick conversation each month. E-mail [graham@blocksmag.com](mailto:graham@blocksmag.com) to share your views



@MINIFIGURESADVENTURES

## 90 YEARS OF LEGO

Blocks asked social media followers to post their pictures of the 90th anniversary issue – Eric Haney shared this incredible photo that includes an enviable display of modulars, fairy lights and of course his copy of Issue 90! Keep sending in those photos and you might see yours in the magazine.



## INSTAGRAM SPOTLIGHT

@MONSIEUR.KEK

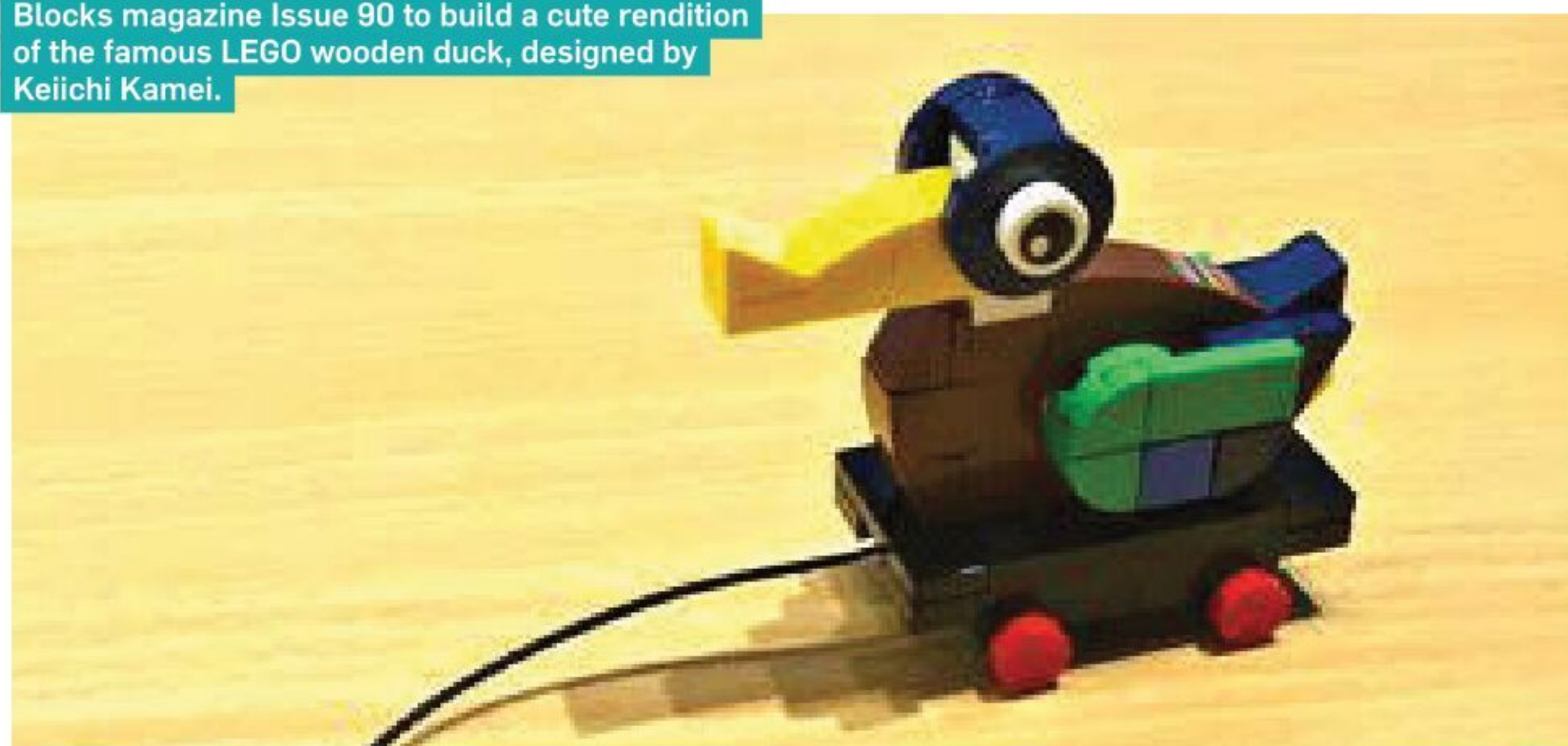


@BRICKPANDA82



## BUILD SPOTLIGHT

Jonathan Grainger used the instructions from Blocks magazine Issue 90 to build a cute rendition of the famous LEGO wooden duck, designed by Keiichi Kamei.





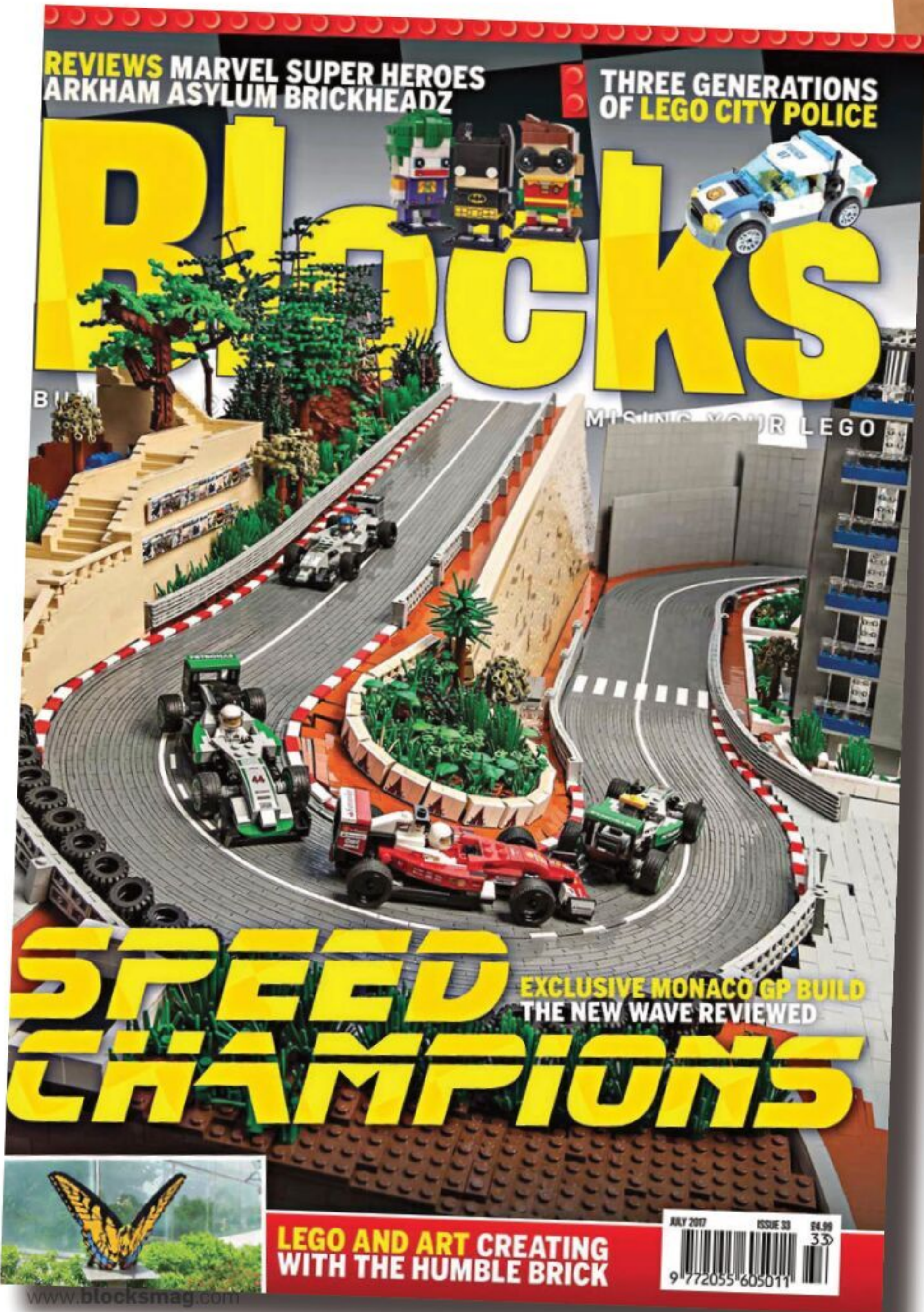
MOD SPOTLIGHT

Colin Barr made some special modifications to 10258 London Bus to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee of Queen Elizabeth II. 70 years ago she became the UK's monarch and there were celebrations across the country in June.



FIVE YEARS AGO THIS MONTH...

Simon Pickard debuted his incredible curving road technique on the cover of Blocks magazine Issue 33, with his Monaco Grand Prix build showcasing Speed Champions sets.



DESERT ISLAND DISCS

In a pun worthy of The Muppets, Anthony Ludditt has shot this fantastic image that sees the new minifigures partying on a vinyl record.





# PUTTING THE *Classic* IN CASTLE

The big 90th anniversary set is the LEGO castle that fans have been dreaming of





You've got bigger –  
and so has a LEGO castle.

**THE FANS HAVE** spoken – and now the big LEGO 90th anniversary set has been unveiled. With 4,514 pieces, 21 minifigures and an immeasurable dose of nostalgia, 10305 Lion Knights' Castle looks to deliver the fortress that fans dreamed of as children.

At the beginning of 2021, a poll launched on LEGO Ideas to find out which classic theme adult fans most wanted to be revisited for the LEGO Group's big anniversary set. First, there were 30 themes from the back catalogue for fans to whittle down... but then an additional vote would reveal which of the top three would be selected for the special release.

More than 77,000 people voted in the first round, but for some reason the Ideas team split Castle into its subthemes – so rather than have just three options to choose from, it was decided that the votes for the various subthemes would be combined and fans could vote for Castle alongside BIONICLE, Classic Space, Pirates or Castle. The result of that final vote was kept secret – until now.

10305 Lion Knights' Castle is the result of the poll, offering an updated and significantly expanded rendition of a classic LEGO castle. While it is clearly influenced by 6080 King's Castle, the model is so carefully shaped and has so many added details that it's much more than a modern version of the original.

**THE MODEL IS SO CAREFULLY SHAPED AND HAS SO MANY ADDED DETAILS THAT IT'S MUCH MORE THAN A MODERN VERSION OF THE ORIGINAL**

The set includes new torso prints for the Lion Knights, soft flags featuring lion logos, an updated Majisto minifigure and a cow. Given that the model is aimed at an adult audience, rather than offering the empty shell of battle-ready fortresses from the 1980s and 1990s, the interior of the build depicts many aspects of castle life.

Fun touches include a secret entrance for the forest people, a water wheel, a kitchen, a banquet table, a dungeon and perhaps best of all, a micro version of 375 Castle – the one that started it all.

Following the example set by 21322 Pirates of Barracuda Bay, 10305 takes the elements of classic LEGO box art, with the yellow border and stripe in the top right-hand corner.

To complement the new castle, LEGO Stores offered a gift with purchase model in June – 40567 Forest Hideout. That modern version of 6054 Forestmen's Hideout takes advantage of the new forest people minifigures to offer a little hideaway using current parts, while clearly being influenced by the classic charm of those 1980s sets. ■

**10305 LION KNIGHTS' CASTLE WILL LAUNCH ON AUGUST 3.**



# LEGO CON REVEALS

This year's livestream unveiled LEGO sets from Avatar, Star Wars, Marvel and more

**JUNE SAW THE** return of LEGO CON, livestreamed from LEGO House. The stream is intended to attract a family audience, with a particular focus on children who might be ageing out of the LEGO brick and need a reminder that it's the best. Despite the family focus, a number of the products revealed during the energetic stream are listed as being specifically for adult fans. Here are some of the highlights...

## 75574 TORUK MAKTO & TREE OF SOULS

LEGO Avatar was announced back in March, but since then fans have been waiting to see any products from the new theme that ties in with James Cameron's epic film series (the second movie will be in cinemas this Christmas). This 1,212 piece set depicts the scene from the original in which Jake becomes the sixth Toruk Makto. The colour choice captures the vibrancy of Avatar, while new parts ensure that the unique physiology of the Pandoran species is reflected in the theme. It will be released in October – the other sets shown on these pages are coming in August.



## 10497 GALAXY EXPLORER

It doesn't matter that Castle was selected in the fan poll, Classic Space is still getting a look in for the 90th anniversary. 497 Galaxy Explorer has been upgraded by fan builders many times, but now it is being reimagined in an official set. It has been upscaled for the occasion so should be swooshable in adult hands – there's even space in the cockpit for four classic-smiley minifigures.



## 21190 THE ABANDONED VILLAGE

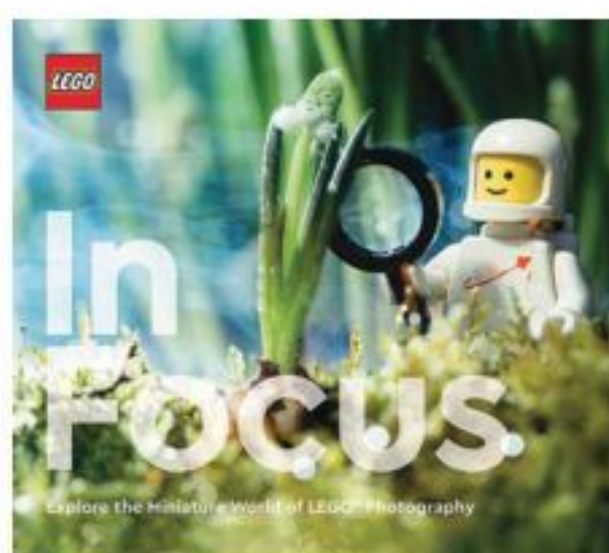
LEGO Minecraft continues to use the building blocks of LEGO bricks to build the game's building blocks, with 21190 The Abandoned Village the latest location to expand the theme. The set's story is that the village has been taken over by zombies – so there's only one thing to do with that sword. Minecraft-style pumpkin heads are a fun touch in this model.



## 40542 FC BARCELONA GO BRICK ME

'member 41597 Go Brick Me? It was probably the best LEGO BrickHeadz set released in the theme, but unfortunately didn't stay on shelves as long as it should have. The scenic route that BrickHeadz takes as a theme continues with this refreshed version of that 2018 set, this time allowing builders to create themselves in a FC Barcelona football kit. Barca fans could even buy many copies of the set and build the whole squad...





### ■ BOOK OF THE MONTH // LEGO IN FOCUS

Coming this October, LEGO in Focus: Explore the Miniature World of LEGO Photography is set to be a volume full of inventive photography. AFOL photography communities Brick Central and Stuck in Plastic, who supply photographs to official LEGO social media channels, have worked with Chronicle on the book – so expect some fun LEGO deep cuts.

### ■ QUICK QUOTE // ANGUS MACLANE

Responding to a question on Twitter about whether there would be more Lightyear LEGO sets, Director Angus MacLane said: 'I really do hope so. I think that a lot might hinge on the sales of the sets that are already released. LEGO does well when IP has vehicles, and \*ahem\* Lightyear has over a dozen featured in the film.'

### 75323 THE JUSTIFIER

With a ship named the Justifier, is Cad Bane insecure? His recent appearances in Star Wars appear to suggest not, as he goes about his bounty hunting business in a very intense fashion. The latest big grey triangle(ish) ship is from The Bad Batch and features a few interior sections. The box will include the much-desired Omega minifigure, a return for Cad Bane and an appearance from his droid sidekick Todo 360.



### 31207 FLORAL ART

LEGO Art continues to go beyond existing designs with this flowery set that allows you to create a pastel-coloured image that will brighten up a room. It should be a nice complement to the Botanical Collection and mercifully, seemingly thanks to the frame being smaller, it's at a lower price point than previous Art sets (£59.99/\$79.99/€69.99).



### 76218 SANCTUM SANCTORUM

Not too long after Doctor Strange returned to the big screen, the LEGO Group is releasing his recognisable abode – in a format that will appeal not just to Marvel collectors, but modular building collectors too. The model is in the same scale as the beloved series, so will make a suitable addition to the never-ending LEGO street (although you may want to remove some of the more magical flourishes). Inside there are movie inspired details, including the museum of mystical collections, and there's a decent line-up of Marvel minifigures too.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### ■ WILFILM TO CLOSE

WilFilm, the Danish studio behind LEGO NINJAGO and LEGO Star Wars animation is in the process of closing down. Unfortunately WilFilm couldn't recover from production pauses during the pandemic. 'It's important to remind ourselves about what a wonderful ride it's been,' Erik Wilstrup said on social media.

### ■ LEGOLAND #10

Merlin Entertainments opened LEGOLAND Korea Resort, a sprawling 28,000 square metre theme park with seven themed lands, on May 5 (which is Children's Day in Korea). Classic attractions including Driving School and Miniland are part of the new destination.

### ■ BOOK CLOSED

Alongside the release of 42143 Ferrari Daytona SP3, the LEGO Group launched a luxury book with a print run of just 5,000 copies. The Sense of Perfection promised to provide insight into the full design process from start to finish, but instead disappointed fans as it sold out almost immediately, with some customers having their orders cancelled.

### ■ CALL ME DARTH

NBA player Miles Turner outed himself as a LEGO fan when showing off his Titanic set. His next acquisition was most impressive, as he had a life-sized Darth Vader statue built by talented LEGO artist Ekow Nimako – but with Miles's likeness rather than the Dark Lord's usual head.



**Word:** Anthony Walker-Cook **Pics:** Disney/20th Century Studios

# RETURNING TO AVATAR

To get ready for the launch of LEGO Avatar, here's a recap of what happened in the original science-fiction epic

Why so blue?



**AVATAR AND ITS** upcoming sequel are arriving in the LEGO portfolio this year. James Cameron's visually stunning cinematic epic arrived back in 2009, demonstrating just what the 3D movie experience could deliver. So, for those readers who can't quite remember what happens in the film, it's worth recapping who's who and what happened so that you're ready for when the LEGO sets arrive.

The film is set on Pandora, a beautiful but dangerous world that has not taken kindly to the

Resources Development Administration (RDA), a company of human settlers (mostly soldiers and scientists) who are there for unobtainium. The indigenous civilisation on Pandora is the Na'vi, slender humanoid figures who respect and worship nature and the goddess Eywa, a deity that maintains the planet's ecosystem.

The film's protagonist is Jake Sully, a disabled war veteran who has been shipped out to Pandora following the death of his twin brother, a scientist who is part of the Avatar Program. As

part of this Program, a human's consciousness is uploaded into a Na'vi host body. The head of the Program is Grace Augustine who attempts to create peaceful links with the Na'vi, however Colonel Miles Quaritch (RDA Head of Security) asks Jake to be his spy and to integrate himself into the Na'vi in return for medical help when he returns to Earth.

Jake meets the tribe sooner than expected when on an expedition Jake (in Avatar form) is separated from the group. Alone in Pandora's forest and hounded by vicious wildlife, Jake meets Neytiri who, it emerges, is the daughter of Eytukan, the leader of the Omatikaya clan that lets Jake and the other scientists in to learn more of their culture and society.

Over the coming months, Jake learns about the ways of the Na'vi and their connection with nature; he also falls in love with Neytiri, however his reconnaissance for Quaritch eventually leads to the destruction of Hometree, a spiritual site that's sacred to the Na'vi but that also has a profuse amount of unobtainium underneath it. It's at this point that the Omatikaya clan also learns of Jake's deception and he's ostracised with the other scientists.

Jake, Grace and Norm Spellman, another Avatar Program driver, are arrested by the RDA but they are soon rescued by pilot Trudy Chacón.

The Tree of Souls is the Na'vi's spiritual centrepiece.







### ■ MINIFIGURE OF THE MONTH // NEYTIRI

The Na'vi minifigures have been unveiled as part of the LEGO Avatar theme. Long minifigure legs, previously used for Woody from Toy Story, are back to depict them as taller than your average minifigure. The head mould has ears too, while the noses are printed onto the face – both of these aspects are important as they convey the Pandoran people's unique aesthetic.

### ■ EYE ON EXCLUSIVES // 40567 FOREST HIDEOUT

There's a blast from the past for the LEGO Group's 90th anniversary – 40567 Forest Hideout revisits the beloved Castle subtheme inspired by Robin Hood. A modern update of 6054 Forestmen's Hideout, the set even opens up with hinges like the original Forestmen sets. This was free at LEGO.com in June and is now being sold through online marketplaces.



### The Hallelujah Mountains.



In the escape, Grace is gravely wounded. Jake attempts to save her by taking her to the Tree of Souls, where the Na'vi attempt to transfer her consciousness permanently into her Avatar form, but they are unsuccessful.

Working with the new chief of the Omatiyaya clan, Tsu'tey, Jake and his allies prepare for an attack on the Tree of Souls by joining up with other clans. During the ensuing battle Tsu'tey and Trudy are killed

being sent into his Na'vi body. Many of the humans are sent away from Pandora and there's a hopeful suggestion that the Na'vi can now begin to rebuild.

Pandora will make for a wonderful setting for new LEGO sets. The vibrant world is full of colour and creatures – even the RDA will require new mech and ship builds to capture their style. It's been more than 10 years since Avatar first released in cinemas, but with

## THE FILM IS SET ON PANDORA, A BEAUTIFUL BUT DANGEROUS WORLD

and all looks lost until the wildlife of Pandora join the fight.

After a final clash with Quaritch in which Sully's human body is exposed to the poisoned Pandoran atmosphere, the film ends with Sully's consciousness successfully

The Way of Water arriving in cinemas this Christmas there will be plenty of opportunity to get immersed in the world all over again, which will only be furthered by the upcoming range of LEGO sets.

### Neytiri, Na'vi princess of the Omatiyaya clan.



## WHERE AVATAR IS GOING NEXT



### AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER

**RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 2022**

The second film in the series is coming more than a decade after being announced. The film is set 10 years after the events of the first Avatar movie and focuses on the Sully family. Director James Cameron has stated that one of the reasons the film has taken so long to prepare is that new technology had to be developed to carry out performance capture under water.

### AVATAR 3

**RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 2024**

Shooting for the film completed in December 2020 as it was shot alongside The Way of Water. Aside from some casting announcements, little is known of the film's plot and how it fits into the franchise.

### AVATAR 4

**RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 2026**

James Cameron first mentioned in 2012 that he would take the series beyond a trilogy. Part of this movie was shot alongside the previous two sequels. It has been acknowledged that whether 4 and 5 go ahead will depend on the success of 2 and 3.

### AVATAR 5

**RELEASE DATE: DECEMBER 2028**

It seems that the writing team working with the imaginative director were very busy, as in 2015 word arrived that there would be a fifth film in the franchise.



# MANY IDEAS

Jazz Quartet released, Galileo tribute announced and a bonus vote – it has been a busy time for LEGO Ideas

21334 Jazz Quartet is the newest Ideas set.



**IT'S A BUSY** time for the LEGO Ideas platform, with the most important news being the release of the latest set from a fan's imagination. Hsinwei Chi came up with the original concept for 21334 Jazz Quartet, which is now available to buy. With 1,606 pieces, it's a sizable model full of life and vibrance, conveying the free-spirited

## ■ ■ THERE IS NOTHING QUITE LIKE THE WARMTH OF JAZZ MUSIC ■ ■

joy of jazz.

'There is nothing quite like the warmth of jazz music, so when I designed this set I wanted the LEGO bricks to truly capture the musical vitality of a live band,' said Hsinwei. 'Much like LEGO building, free-spirited jazz can be medicine for your mind – so I hope when the Jazz Quartet set is built and displayed, people will feel a connection to the music.'

The fan originally submitted the concept in a LEGO Ideas competition, but it wasn't selected

for release. Rather than give up, he submitted it as a product idea; the model gained 10,000 votes and got a second chance, so the review panel changed their tune.

Results were recently announced from the Ready, Set, Go, STEM! contest. Tribute to Galileo Galilei by Firecrack\_! will be adapted into an official set that will be free with purchases at LEGO.com at some point next year.

Another opportunity for fans to choose a LEGO Ideas came up through a collaboration between the platform and US retail giant Target. Three product ideas that reached 10,000 votes but were then rejected were offered up for users to vote on; Viking Village, Marine Life and Mini-Golf. Voting has closed, but at print time the winning set has not been announced. It will be a Target exclusive in the US.

Sticking with second chance product ideas, BrickLink Designer Program sold out of all five sets

that made the cut in the final round of the process. 1950s Diner, Winter Chalet, Modular Construction Site, Mountain View Observatory and Studgate Train Station are limited to 10,000 sets each, with the sets due to ship next

As for the old-fashioned route to achieving every LEGO fan's dream, 39 product ideas received 10,000 votes in the first 2022 review. This eclectic mix of models will now be assessed to see which concepts the LEGO Group wants to take forward, with an announcement likely later in the year.







#### ■ POLY-AMOROUS // 30510 90 YEARS OF CARS

The 90th anniversary releases continue with this upcoming polybag. The vehicles in the set are intended to pay homage to actual LEGO vehicles over the years – namely 392 Formula 1, 6538 Rebel Roadster, 7236 Police Car and 31079 Sunshine Surfer Van.

#### ■ SET OF THE MONTH // 76233 NANO GAUNTLET

Given that 76191 Infinity Gauntlet went down so well with fans, it makes a lot of sense that 76223 Nano Gauntlet is now being added to the LEGO Marvel collection. At a similar size to the previous set, it will make a nice complementary model as it's in a more heroic colour scheme that matches Iron Man's armour.



## BLOCKS BOOKS

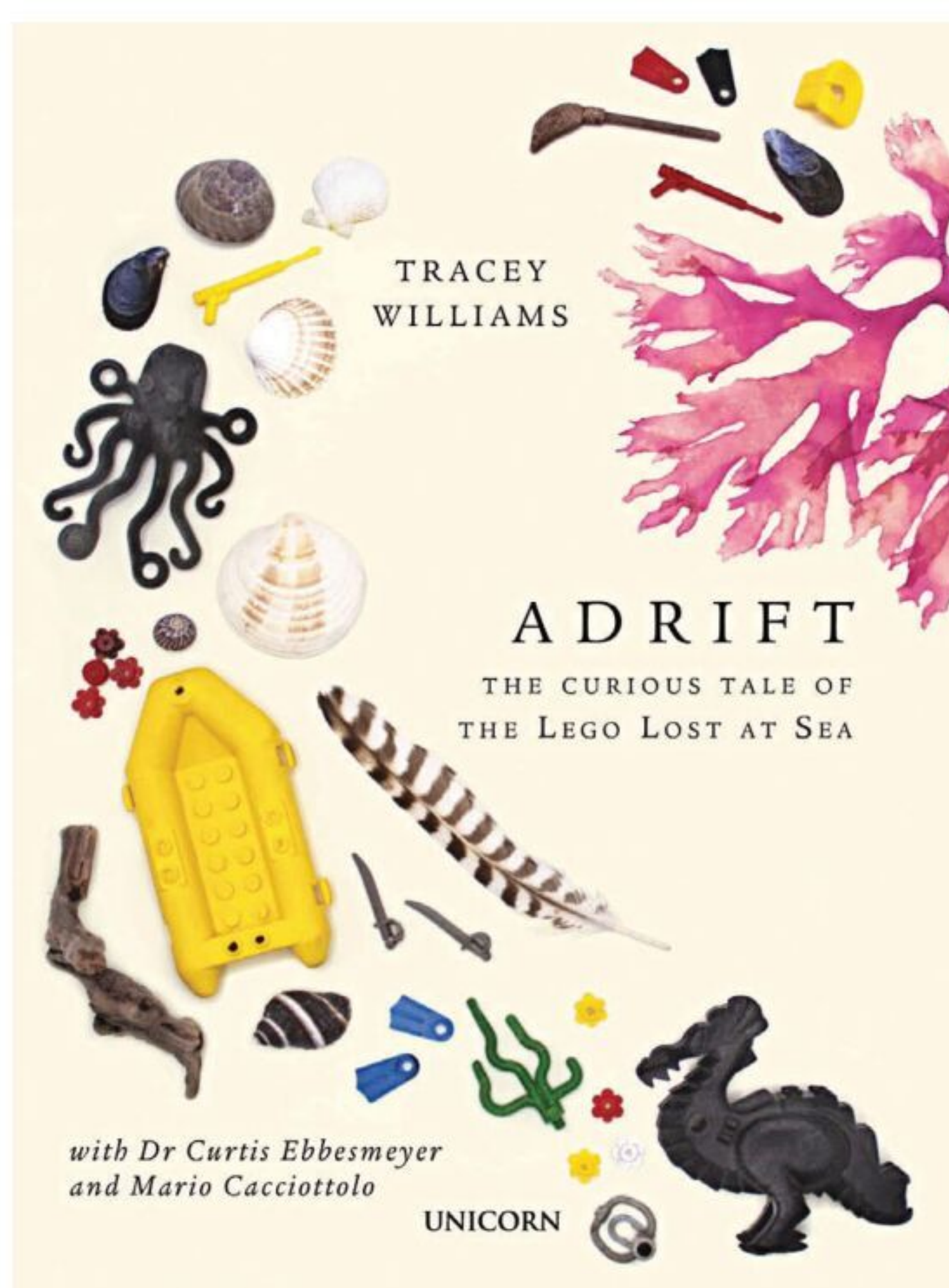
# ADrift

**TRACEY WILLIAMS HAS** been maintaining a record of the various plastic oddities that have been washing up on beaches in Cornwall since containers fell from a ship 20 miles off the shore in 1997. Millions of LEGO bricks fell into the ocean and have provided a hook to the story ever since; people find it because they are fascinated by the idea of finding a LEGO dragon or octopus on the beach, giving Tracey the opportunity to raise awareness about keeping beaches clean.

That does not mean that the book she has now written (its full title is *Adrift: The Curious Tale of the LEGO Lost at Sea*) is preachy or focused entirely on environmental damage. The beautifully illustrated, thoughtfully laid out title captures the whimsy of beachcombing, the spirit of living by the sea and the science that goes into tracking where this debris comes from.

When such a specific topic is covered in one title it's an opportunity to really look at it in an interesting way and Tracey has done just that, with input from some fascinating interviewees and co-authors. This coffee table book is a strong addition to your LEGO library and will have particular resonance for UK based readers, who will remember hearing about the brick beaches many times on the news over the past 20 years.

**Unicorn, £20.00**



## NEWS IN BRIEF

#### ■ DOT THE SIMS

LEGO DOTS has added another collaboration to the theme's growing list, with digital packs and unlockable extras themed around DOTS available in the mobile game *The Sims Freeplay*. All sorts of items in the game will be customisable using the familiar patterns from the decorative theme. It's a limited thing though, with DOTS available in the game until July 24.

#### ■ MORE MASTERS

Will Arnett is returning with more build challenges for LEGO loving contestants when the US edition of *LEGO Masters* returns on September 21. FOX will air Season 3 before running a special celebrity version for a few nights during the holiday season. Previous seasons have seen the winning pair of builders awarded a \$100,000 prize.

#### ■ F1 FALCON FAN

Formula 1 champion Lewis Hamilton recently revealed that as a child he was a huge LEGO fan – but hasn't built with the System since. That's all going to change as he recently acquired the epic 75192 Millennium Falcon. 'I finally got myself this bad boy. Since I'm a Star Wars fan – this is a dream,' he said on Instagram.

#### ■ BUILD AND RACE

LEGOLAND California Resort has seen the installation of a life-sized Ferrari F40 as part of the new Build and Race attraction. Theme park visitors can build their own Ferrari, test it on a variety of tracks, then rebuild it and test it out again.

## JUST THE FACTS

# 42143 FERRARI DAYTONA SP3

42143 Ferrari Daytona SP3 is available now.

The real-life Daytona SP3 pays tribute to 1960s race cars.

42143 is the fourth in the series of ultimate Technic supercars.

At 1:8 scale, the model is 59cm long and 25cm wide.

The set is made up of 3,778 pieces.





Word: Anthony Walker-Cook Pics: Thunderful Games

# LEGO BRICKTALES

Anthony Walker-Cook gets an early peek at Bricktales to see if this puzzle-solving game is built with LEGO charm and ingenuity

Everything is built from LEGO bricks.



**AS A DEDICATED** instruction-manual builder who tragically is not gifted with the ability or brio to build MOCs or features of any size, I was intrigued and cautious when sent the promotional materials to play a demo of LEGO Bricktales, a new videogame created by Thunderful Games and ClockStone Studio that has you building to solve puzzles.

Yet I'm glad to report that this charming, highly addictive game offers much promise. The story seems relatively simple – you need to help find Happiness Crystals to power a machine that will quickly fix and tidy everything on Grandpa's fair, which is at risk of being taken away by the Mayor. To do so, you travel to various locations

Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga, Bricktales' design is suitably blocky. You can see how each environment is made out of individual bricks and our unnamed protagonist moves as you would expect a minifigure to. This is certainly cute, but it can at times be a little slow.

Bricktales is a modernisation of the LEGO Creator video games that some of you might remember from the 1990s and early 2000s spliced with the digital brick-building experience of programmes like Stud.io, LeoCAD and LEGO Digital Designer. You'll be faced with obstacles as you work through the environments – you'll need to build a bridge, create a support for a wobbly base or re-create a monkey statue – at

which point you'll enter into a studio with a set number of bricks and have to build a solution.

This is where I got nervous. How could I produce something that would work? In fact, the builds came surprisingly quickly. They weren't pretty, but they were practical (my life mantra). A particularly nice touch is that these builds then stay in the world – they're not replaced with some pre-created solution. Oh no, you get to marvel at the simplicity, the beauty, the inelegance and/or the functionality of whatever it is you've created unless you decide to try and build something better.

Once you've built your solution, you press the 'Simulate' button, in which a little robot will

## YOU'LL BE FACED WITH OBSTACLES AS YOU WORK THROUGH THE ENVIRONMENTS

to help people, which should then produce the crystals.

For the preview, Blocks was given roughly the first hour (if you're slow like me) to play. Unfortunately I couldn't get any crystals but it did introduce many of the game's mechanics.

Following the hyper-realism (or as much as can be achieved in a LEGO video game) of LEGO



Grandpa's tired and messy funfair.



### ■ REWARD OF THE MONTH // VINTAGE STYLE OCTAN CAP

You can pretend to be running your own Octan petrol station with this baseball cap from the VIP Reward Centre. It's a great design choice but if it's not for you then alternatively there's a Classic Space one. Both are distressed, to give the impression that you've had them since the relevant sets launched back in the 1980s. As ever, stock may run out at any moment.

### ■ SET OF THE MONTH // 41955 STITCH-ON PATCH

LEGO DOTS introduced a new part in this set – and an unusual one at that. This is a flexible 6x6 plate that can be sewn onto clothing, a bag... whatever you desire. Tiny holes around the edge of the flexible plate are where you'll be running the thread through, so theoretically this could find uses beyond clothing. Keep an eye out to see what creative uses other LEGO fans find for this unusual part.



Creating a helicopter.

test the stability and utility of your creation. The agents of chaos among you will be able to set up creations that you know will fail then watch your poor robot fall down a chasm or fly off chaotically in a helicopter that's got the propellor bizarrely attached to the left wing. The choice is yours.

A few camera angles can mean you accidentally click and remove the wrong brick in the build studio, but otherwise it's pretty seamless and offers some addictive gameplay. The puzzles are short enough to make you think, but not so challenging that you're put off – there's that temptation to just do one more, to see what else can be done.

The difficulty is also pretty well pitched so that both adults and children will be able to enjoy the game – I found myself struggling early on with creating a flight of stairs. There's also the pull to go back and make each build more functional or aesthetically pleasing, or indeed to test a new idea entirely.

But in that opportunity to retry builds lies the true appeal of Bricktales. When we think of LEGO bricks, we think of the unlimited possibilities of the imagination, of the builds and scenarios that we can create. The trailer seems to suggest that other levels will include pyramids, deserted islands and medieval castles, and there will no doubt be more. The taster I've had has left me hungry for more, so I eagerly anticipate the release of Bricktales later in 2022.



The first challenge is to build some stairs.

## ICONS FOR ADULTS

The collection of products for adults is getting a new name

**THE LEGO GROUP'S** attempt to retire the Creator Expert theme hasn't worked out as intended, with a new name being brought in to replace it. It turns out that it's not just the Blocks magazine team who were struggling to know how to refer to adult sets that aren't Architecture or Ideas sets, so Icons will be the new branding.

In a statement, the company explained: 'we will be uniting many of our adult focused LEGO sets under the name LEGO Icons to help our adult consumers easily to find new, immersive builds or models that link to their interests and passions, particularly when shopping or browsing online.'



LEGO Icons has a new logo.

# Icons™

### NEWS IN BRIEF

#### ■ DIVERSE FIGURES

60347 Supermarket, the LEGO City set released as part of the summer wave, includes the first modern world LEGO minifigure with a prosthetic limb. This continues the diversification of minifigures in City, which has also included characters who use hearing aids, seeing-eye dogs and wheelchairs.

#### ■ FAMOUS FAN

Video game creator Hideo Kojima revealed on social media that he has bought – and built – LEGO Ideas 21333 Vincent Van Gogh – The Starry Night. The creative is beloved within the world of gaming, as he is responsible for the Metal Gear franchise and Death Stranding.

#### ■ BRICK THE RULES

A new campaign from the LEGO Group encourages children to 'Brick the Rules'. It's all about promoting unregulated play and unlocking imagination, rather than following predefined guidelines. Marketing materials from the campaign are being used in UAE, KSA and South Africa.

#### ■ REBUILD FOR 90TH

A new advert as part of the LEGO Rebuild the World brand campaign celebrates the LEGO 90th anniversary while encouraging children, adults and families to keep playing. There are plenty of references to both classic and modern LEGO themes, set and minifigures, plus historical items like the wooden duck.





# HOT TOPIC

Blocks staffers debate the big bulletins



**THIS MONTH:** A new ride is coming to the fairground with 10303 Loop Coaster – should fans be happy with the set or frustrated at the new colour for the track?



Kat Rees-Jauke

## IT'S UNLIKELY THAT FANS ARE GOING TO COMBINE THE TWO

10303 Loop Coaster is big. It's an ingenious design. And very colourful. It is also completely different to its predecessor 10261 Roller Coaster. New track elements have been made specifically for this set and they're a cheerful sunshine yellow, while 10261 was a bright red. I don't think this colour change will bother most fans. Considering the massive footprint of both of these sets, not to mention their completely different aesthetics, it's unlikely that fans are going to combine the two. The brick engineering alone would be extremely challenging, and the space required is unattainable in most homes. 10261 Roller Coaster is also a retired set now and fans might not necessarily want to hunt it down. It captured retro amusement park nostalgia, while this newer one is a lot more modern. These two sets are meant to be displayed or played with separately. Having a different colour allows fans to add something fresh to a LEGO theme park display and it means the LEGO Group are avoiding the straight re-release bug too.

Let's hope those minifigures don't mind heights.



Graham Hancock

## THE VIBRANT YELLOW WILL STAND OUT

There are certain sets where the LEGO Group is very focused on tradition – for example in both 2009 and 2015, LEGO Pirates had a big ship with red and white sails in homage to 6285 Black Seas Barracuda. While that particular ship is iconic, there's no need to nod to it every single time there's a new pirate ship – there should be variety, so that those who collect several of them have more interesting displays. That's why switching up the colour of the coaster track for 10303 Loop Coaster was such an excellent decision; rather than having another attraction with red rails, the vibrant yellow will stand out as something different in a fairground display. It's hard to imagine the designers being satisfied with something that could be mistaken from the 2018 coaster – so they have opted for something distinct, both in height and colour.



Daniel Konstanski

## AN EXCEPTION SHOULD HAVE BEEN MADE HERE

Different classes of elements regularly have their colours changed to keep lines feeling fresh and novel. It's a technique that works well most of the time. A great example are the dinosaurs in the Jurassic World theme. They are the same parts, but different colours and prints give the sense that this year's T. rex is totally different from the one two years ago. However, there need to be exceptions to this constant change and roller coaster track should have been one where, at least on the flagship sets, all the track remained red. Combining new track elements with old ones is going to look awful. What if I want to combine the new loop track components with the coaster I already have? The LEGO Group would never think of making train track different colours from year to year because combining new with old is what allows for expansive layouts. It would have been worth the small loss in novelty to have all of the track pieces in red, so fans could build better looking custom roller coasters.



# Blocks

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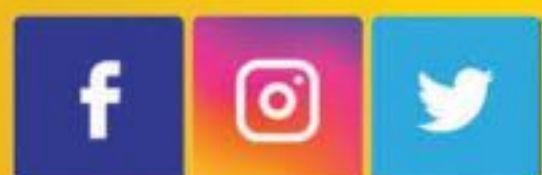
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LEGO Ideas Design Manager Sam Johnson.

# SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

LEGO Ideas Design Manager Sam Johnson had to build at Sonic speed to get the Green Hill Zone set finished in time

Words: Graham Hancock Pics: The LEGO Group

**EARLIER THIS YEAR**, 21331 Sonic the Hedgehog arrived in a LEGO set that delivered a colourful recreation of the starting point of his adventure in the original video game that was released in 1991. The Green Hill Zone was inspired by Viv Grannell's LEGO Ideas

submission, which received the vital 10,000 votes from fellow brick devotees, before being considered by the people in Billund.

To the delight of the Blue Bur's fanbase, the model was approved – but there was a bit of a time crunch when it came to getting it designed

and ready for sale. LEGO Ideas Design Manager Sam Johnson took on the task himself, marking the first time he got hands-on with the bricks for a few years. Here, he discusses what went into delivering a satisfying Sonic set...

The set creates the Green Hill Zone.

## ■ DESIGNING THE SET

**Sam:** I really wanted to do this myself, but I want to do all them all myself – I wish I could be more selfish and just take them all myself, but I don't have the capacity to be able to design them all and I'm not always the right person to design a particular set. For this one, we were actually lacking designers in LEGO Ideas, you know, we couldn't find anyone who was available. I was like, 'well, can't I make this one?' This was my opportunity to be able to do one, and for an IP that I really love and experienced as a kid when it was new.





### ■ MAKING CHANGES

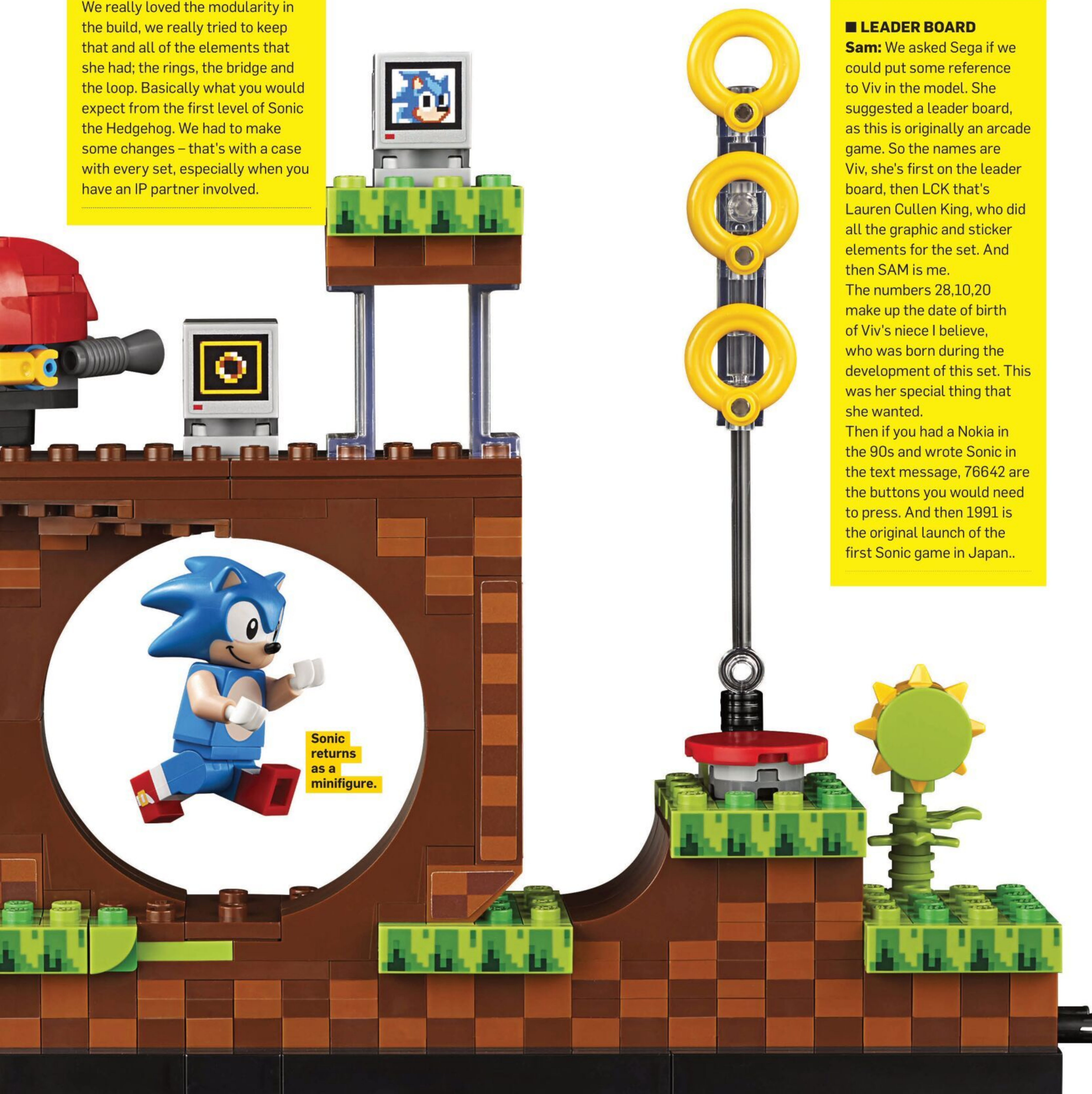
**Sam:** With LEGO Ideas we are doing our very best to keep the fan design alive so we partnered with Viv, the fan designer for this, and Sega who are the owner and creators of Sonic the Hedgehog. Viv did a great job of making this really charming submission. We took that to Sega, knowing that there would be an anniversary for the original Sonic the Hedgehog game. Luckily for us, the Green Hill Zone appears in both games and it was the main part of Viv's submission. We really loved the modularity in the build, we really tried to keep that and all of the elements that she had; the rings, the bridge and the loop. Basically what you would expect from the first level of Sonic the Hedgehog. We had to make some changes – that's with a case with every set, especially when you have an IP partner involved.

### ■ BRINGING LEGO SONIC BACK

**Sam:** It's actually a pretty interesting part of the story. We made a Sonic the Hedgehog set for LEGO Dimensions [in 2016]. We were on such a short timeline that we were like 'how are we going to do this? Let's see if the old Sonic is available.' Unfortunately, it was deleted. We found out that our timeline was actually too short to be able to make a brand new Sonic. Luckily, the old one that we made looks exactly like the classic Sonic but has this new print on it, a more modernised print. We were able to recut the mould, make it again for the set. So we recut it and optimised it a little bit, then looked at revamping it with brand new decorations and colours. So it's actually moulded in different colours to the original LEGO Sonic the Hedgehog, the old one was in tan, whereas this one uses 283 light nougat. We went for the colour palette that fit best rather than regurgitating what we'd done before. It really benefits the minifigure.

### ■ LEADER BOARD

**Sam:** We asked Sega if we could put some reference to Viv in the model. She suggested a leader board, as this is originally an arcade game. So the names are Viv, she's first on the leader board, then LCK that's Lauren Cullen King, who did all the graphic and sticker elements for the set. And then SAM is me. The numbers 28,10,20 make up the date of birth of Viv's niece I believe, who was born during the development of this set. This was her special thing that she wanted. Then if you had a Nokia in the 90s and wrote Sonic in the text message, 76642 are the buttons you would need to press. And then 1991 is the original launch of the first Sonic game in Japan..





DANIEL KONSTANSKI

# MY FIRST LEGO GAME

Daniel recalls playing LEGO Island as a child – his first ever experience of a LEGO video game

It was Christmas 1996 and my brother, sister and I awoke to find an unusually large and heavy package beneath our tree. It ended up being, to our extreme delight, a CD-ROM that my dad was going to install on our computer.

This story is going to date me and may raise some questions for anyone under the age of 25. The box was heavy because early CD-ROMs were heavy beasts that came in boxes. Plus, this one included a bunch of games and programmes in their own independent boxes; my dad had sprung for a package deal! Additionally, this was a big deal because up until this point we could only load games from a far smaller disk. These futuristic CD-ROMs opened up a whole new world for my siblings and I to learn... well, let's be honest, to play better games.

We were just in time as that very next year the first LEGO game released in the US. There was technically one official title before this from the company, a Japanese only entry called LEGO Fun to Build. I have actually seen that game in real life and it was definitely not ready for mass distribution. The LEGO Group's second outing was going to be called LEGO Island. My brother and I started seeing advertisements for it in the LEGO Club magazine almost a year ahead of its release in



**DANIEL KONSTANSKI**

Lifelong LEGO obsessive passionate about collecting. With a thorough knowledge of LEGO over the years, he is Blocks' historian.

September 1997 and we received it as a joint gift for Christmas that same year.

Today, we are so awash in LEGO based games that it is difficult, or even impossible, to remember a time before the digital brick was a thing. However, on the afternoon of that December 25, my brother and I sat down together and the experience was almost magical. Never before had we been able

to virtually shrink down to the size of a minifigure or interact virtually with sets and characters.

The game was actually quite ambitious for its era. While I didn't know the term then, and it may not have even been coined, today we would call LEGO Island an open world game, albeit a crude one.

LEGO Island's premise was that there existed a small island out in the middle of the ocean populated with minifigure characters and sets available at the time of its development. Major locations included a racetrack based on 6337 Fast Track Finish, 6350 Pizza to Go pizzeria, 6598 Metro PD Police Station and 6334 Wave Jump

Racers. It's a testimony to how long the set development process used to be that game developers had access to finished models far enough back to have put them in the game.

These various buildings and locations were connected via virtual representations of the old grey road plates and players were free to walk or drive between them. Each allowed the launch of a unique activity for which you would first construct a LEGO vehicle. In keeping with the LEGO Group's mission to facilitate creative play, there was no linear storyline and you could repeat activities as many times as desired.

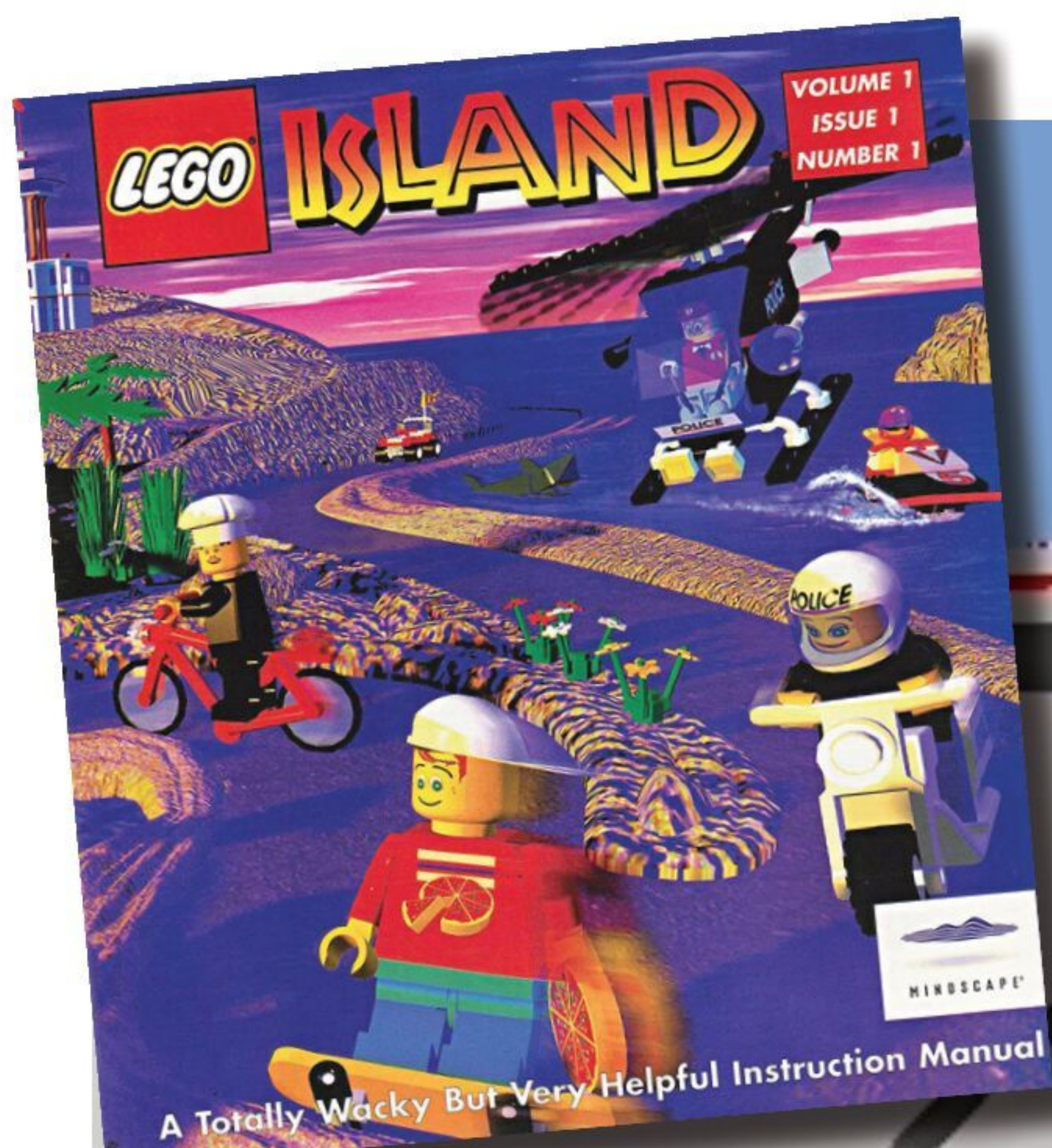
Kids like me who knew the entire product line inside and out were treated to a variety of easter eggs and references such as the giant pirate skeleton in the car racing activity that would kick you off the level or the Aquazone octopus in another area. Nearly every model or character you interacted with could be purchased in an official set.

The game certainly had its oddities. LEGO Island's antagonist, the Brickster, would try to get players to deliver a pizza to him in jail. If you did this, he used the hot cheese to melt the lock (which raises a host of questions about what those pizza chefs were putting on their pies), escape, and begin disassembling the island. This culminated in a showdown where you flew a helicopter and baited him by shooting more pizzas into his vicinity while the cops closed in. If you could keep him distracted long enough to get the cops right next to the Brickster, they would re-capture him and you would beat that activity. Should you fail, however, there was a pretty dark cutscene with the Brickster gloating over your defeat atop a destroyed LEGO Island with lightning flashing in the background and sound effects of people crying.

All these years later I still have very fond memories of that first LEGO game, it was a truly magical experience for someone who loved LEGO toys as much as I did. Though quaint by today's standards, it holds up pretty well considering the era and showed a lot of creativity and even the first inklings of that particular LEGO humour that permeates most of the brand's modern games. ■







The manual that came with the game.

Anyone for pizza?



The Infomaniac is full of advice.



The Brickster is the game's villain.





KAT REES-JAUKE

# EXPENSIVE FREEBIES

Kat is changing her habits when it comes to collecting gift with purchase items as the spending thresholds keep going up

**T**O TEMPT FANS to shop at the official LEGO Store there are usually freebies or gift with purchases (GWPs), in fact there's now sometimes more than one in a month. These can range from exclusive polybags and minifigures, or small sets to tie-in with new waves of licensed themes. There's always seasonal offerings during key holidays too.

Gift with purchases are fun and sometimes quite collectible due to their limited release. However, I've begun to feel that GWPs are no longer worth the spend, which was only exacerbated for me by this year's May the Fourth promotions. Why am I turning down free LEGO sets? Well, the hint is in the name – gift with purchases require a purchase and the cost of those purchases is getting pretty steep.

Gift with purchases used to be available by buying one or two middle range sets and came with orders somewhere near £50 (\$65). This was pretty easily accessible for most fans as it matched the minimum value needed for free delivery. And let's face it – everyone wants free delivery. So I used to get a lot of GWPs at this price bracket, particularly exclusive minifigures, and I have a bag overflowing with polybags to attest to that. I'd simply take a look at the monthly LEGO Store calendar, see when the freebies were available, and wait to buy my next LEGO purchases until then.

My favourite gift with purchase was always the super exclusive May the Fourth minifigure... in the days when it actually was a minifigure. As a massive LEGO Star Wars collector these were the chance to get obscure characters who had never appeared before. 5002123 Darth Revan is a prized possession of mine (particularly given his Dark Side resale value), and he marks the only time that Knights of the Old Republic has made it into the brick. Then there was Admiral Yularen, because why not have someone who doesn't have a word of dialogue? Then there was a decidedly average First Order Stormtrooper. While they didn't all make the galaxy explode, they were becoming a tradition.

I haven't bought anything from the LEGO Store during the May the Fourth period in several years. What's making me skip this shopping occasion? Firstly, it's because the minifigure has now been replaced with dioramas, which don't appeal to me as much. If I want a diorama I'll buy a Star Wars



**KAT REES-JAUKE**

Part of the Blocks review team, Kat uses her LEGO knowledge to cast a discerning eye over the latest sets.

location set. Mainly though, it is the price threshold. This year's gift with purchase, 40531 Lars Family Homestead Kitchen was only available free with orders over £160 or \$160. Basically, fans had to either buy a ton of Star Wars sets, or the new Ultimate Collector Series 75341 Luke Skywalker's Landspeeder. Now, I love my LEGO collection, but

## I CANNOT JUSTIFY THAT AMOUNT OF MONEY JUST FOR A BRICK KITCHEN

even I cannot justify that amount of money in a single transaction just for a brick kitchen!

Gift with purchases are requiring higher and higher spending thresholds, which are becoming less accessible to so many fans. Rather than just being added to a normal order, they now require planning to actually manage to qualify for one. What's happening is that the GWPs are getting more complicated, often being a small set in their own right rather than just a polybag. They are clearly taking more time to design and produce, and these costs are being passed on to the consumer. Yet fans didn't ask for complicated GWPs. I was very happy with a polybag, minifigure keychain or even a magnet. And it's not just the

May the Fourth promotion that's getting steeper – back in the spring there was the 40530 Jane Goodall Tribute that required a purchase of £120 (\$120).

At this point I hardly even bother going after gifts with purchases. It is often cheaper just to buy the gift on the resale market, which I have turned to for the ones that I find really interesting as well as the seasonal releases. It's gotten to the point where GWPs have defeated their own purpose and I don't think they are enticing anymore. I would rather buy the gift than have to buy a huge haul of LEGO products, which is becoming increasingly frustrating at the LEGO Store because of stock issues and back orders, along with some gifts selling out because of unexpected popularity.

Gift with purchases are not bad in and of themselves. It's great to have a little something for buying directly from the LEGO Store, but I think they have lost their true purpose. These gifts should just be an add-on for a regular purchase, not requiring the splurging that has become the standard. LEGO sets aren't getting cheaper, nor is anything else, and the LEGO Store needs to take this into account. I wish they would pull back on these dioramas or mini builds that require high spending thresholds and return to the fun days of minifigures, magnets and polybags. ■







Did someone say polybags?

Darth Revan, Kat's most prized minifigure.



Always two there are. One to build, one to keep sealed.



GRAHAM HANCOCK

# GOING RETRO

Graham revels in the nostalgia that the LEGO Group is delivering with the special 90th anniversary sets

**T**HERE ARE many ways that the LEGO Group has been tapping into nostalgia of late, not least with this month's cover star, 10302 Optimus Prime and other sets in the last year or two 71374 Nintendo Entertainment System. Generally though, the company has avoided going too far into its own back catalogue when it comes to retro content, aside from references and nods in promotional models.

An occasion where the LEGO design team did go full throttle down the nostalgia tunnel was with the Ideas set, 21322 Pirates of Barracuda Bay. After having conversations with Pablo Sánchez Jiménez, the fan who designed the original submission, and realising how much he adored classic LEGO Pirates, the designers behind the set decided to fully commit to bringing back the original theme.

Classic box art was recreated, vintage minifigures were updated and all of the trappings that fans associated with LEGO Pirates were used to ensure the experience felt like stepping back in time. The model itself though used modern build techniques to recreate 6285 Black Seas Barracuda in a way that feels satisfying today.

10305 Lion Knights' Castle and 10497 Galaxy Explorer follow this format, seemingly having been influenced by 21322. There's something ridiculously fun about seeing an old concept taken and delivered in this kind of format; back when Castle was actually on shelves, a 4,500 piece set was unimaginable – the designers of those models were lucky to get 450 pieces. Similarly with 10497 Galaxy Explorer, it's absolutely incredible that four astronauts can be seated together in a single cockpit.

There's a tricky line to walk when it comes to bringing back old sets. On a few occasions, the LEGO Group has released almost straight reissues of classic models. One issue with that approach is that fans who want the original, but can't justify paying aftermarket prices, have to accept that it isn't quite the original; inevitably tweaks have to be made because certain parts have been retired or changed. Another drawback is that collectors trying to buy the original can fall foul of misunderstandings as sellers confuse



**GRAHAM HANCOCK**

A LEGO expert who can't remember life without the brick, Graham loves using that knowledge to bring Blocks to the shelf every single month.

the genuine original with the reissue. As the LEGO Group's design standards improve at pace, the biggest problem is when consumers buy a reissue and find the quality of the build experience to be lacking.

That's why releasing modern interpretations of beloved sets seems like a best-of-both-

**■ DURING THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY YEAR THESE NOSTALGIA SETS ARE AN EXCELLENT CHOICE ■■**

worlds approach. People who have been in the hobby too long as well as those who weren't around the first time get to enjoy the feeling of getting the classic box art and wonderfully clean design of original Space and Castle sets, whilst average consumers who buy these boxes won't be disappointed by a lacklustre build. Those collectors who have lovingly preserved their childhood sets won't see the specialness of their models diluted, because they have been updated rather than replicated.

Now that Castle and Space have been

delivered along with Pirates, the core themes have been covered – Town of course would also be welcome, but arguably City and the Modular Building Collection are both delivering an updated version of the beloved 'everyday life' theme (10184 Town Plan, released in 2008, offered a brick-built version of a Town Plan set, but wasn't technically a homage to LEGO Town). Fans of each of those original LEGO System themes will be delighted as they open the lovingly created yellow boxes and build these modern reimaginings of the classics.

What the LEGO Group should avoid though is doing this too often. The restraint shown so far has been admirable, and during the 90th anniversary year these nostalgia sets are an excellent choice. If they become an ongoing series or a regular occurrence though, the novelty won't be there and they'll be taken for granted in the same way that modular buildings are (it's well worth remembering how eager fans were for minifigure scale buildings before 2007).

The reason that Space, Castle, Pirates and Town hold such special places in our hearts is because they don't exist anymore. You can't walk into a toyshop and see shelves full of 1980s and 1990s LEGO sets – they exist because of your fond memories and rose-tinted glasses, because you admired them in catalogues and dreamt of owning the biggest set you never unwrapped for Christmas. Nothing can ever beat the originals – even if your childhood copy of the set has broken clips and discoloured white bricks. So while the LEGO Group made an excellent decision in releasing 10305 Lion Knights' Castle, 40567 Forest Hideout and 10497 Galaxy Explorer, these updated classics should continue to be used sparingly for special occasions. Nostalgia's a funny thing – you should only cater to it so much. ■







One cockpit, four minifigures.



Galaxy Explorer returns.



The Lion Knights are back.



# IT'S PRIME TIME

When it was time to roll out the Transformers set fans never thought possible, one model designer was better qualified than most to deliver LEGO Optimus Prime

**Words:** Dave Cartlidge **Pics:** The LEGO Group





**IN THE EARLY** 1980s, the Japanese toy market started to become obsessed with robots of all shapes and sizes. Within a few years, there were 'transforming' robots that could change into objects such as cameras, guns or even vehicles. Hasbro was keen to tap into this exciting new trend and working with Takara toys they licensed an initial range of 26 robots to be created for the American market.

The line-up of cars and fighter jets was based on existing Japanese designs, but it was a collaboration with Marvel comics that led to the storyline, names and backgrounds of the first generation (G1) Transformers. Going that deep into creating lore for the toys meant that the Robots in Disguise became a worldwide hit and dominated the 1984 Christmas toy market.

The most iconic and beloved of these was a 'hero truck', originally known as Battle Conoy before being renamed Optimus Prime for the US market, where he was leader of the heroic Autobots. Prime will always hold a special place in the hearts of fans who grew up in this era.

**Senior Designer**  
**Joseph Patrick Kyde**  
with 10302 Optimus  
Prime.

**Element Design**  
**Master Yoel Mazur**





One such fan who understands this very well is LEGO Senior Designer Joseph Patrick Kyde, who was tasked with creating Optimus in brick form. 'It was not something I ever expected to happen,' Joseph says. 'Hasbro approached us and said, "do you want to make a LEGO Optimus Prime?" and we said, "yes!"'

Certainly, fans were not expecting this landmark collaboration between two huge toy companies either. Joseph had grown up with both LEGO System toys and Transformers – as had his partner on the project, Element Designer Yoel Mazur. 'I used to make LEGO Stunticons when I was a child. When this opportunity came up I was stalking Jo, just to be a part of it,' Yoel laughs.

For Joseph it was a perfect assignment thanks to his own professional background as well as his childhood enthusiasm. 'I already knew a bit about what I was doing, so I was brought in,' he says modestly. Prior to working for the LEGO Group, he worked at Hasbro designing Transformer toys – but he thought his time designing those changeable robots was over. 'Looking at the box and seeing those names together... LEGO, Hasbro and Takara – it's a milestone.'

Initially, the model designer wasn't even convinced that a LEGO Transformer would be possible. 'I was a little sceptical at first that it could be done, but I saw an initial sketch and thought, "maybe we can pull this off".'

Despite the inherent complexity that designing a transforming model entails, Joseph had the usual timeframe for the project. 'I didn't have a lot longer for the design phase compared to other Expert sets and it was a lot of work,' he explains. 'I blocked out the transformation mechanisms first. The original sketch model that I did was a little smaller and used smaller tyres, but once the transformation was designed it was a case of scaling

it up. Luckily Optimus Prime is a little boxy so it was quite easy to look at the proportions and build literal boxes out of bricks to get the right size between the arms and legs and all that.'

His familiarity with the G1 Optimus Prime meant he didn't even need to use a toy as a reference. 'We go way back. I had the original toy in Christmas 1984 – I'm pretty familiar with him. My toys are stored away at my parent's house though. I used some reference images but mostly conjured it from memory.'

'Knowing Prime inside and out, knowing how it could be done because I've designed Optimus Prime toys before, definitely helped me.' That's not to say it was easy though. 'The hardest part was the torso twist. The centre of mass of his body and the rotation in there was really difficult. It

took a lot of iterations and used a lot of elements before we got to a final design.'

Fans who are used to building rigid Technic centres through their sets may be surprised that the finished model doesn't use more Technic elements to accomplish

the transformation. 'I definitely explored Technics because getting the rock-solid construction is pretty important when you're making something that transforms, but I found that System solutions were better for what I needed,' says Joseph.

'A lot of the Technic solutions make it hard to get back to System bricks and cover up how you made it, and there's not a whole lot of free space with Optimus – every inch is creating a specific look or specific function.'

That isn't to say that Technic doesn't make an appearance, with a new flex joint required for the hips. 'We are doing this connection in a lot of robots but the existing three module wide hip joint was too large – making it smaller without an extra Technic beam sticking out was an advantage,'

## ■ ■ ■ THERE'S NOT A WHOLE LOT OF FREE SPACE WITH OPTIMUS – EVERY INCH IS CREATING A SPECIFIC LOOK OR SPECIFIC FUNCTION ■ ■ ■

The set transforms from truck to robot.



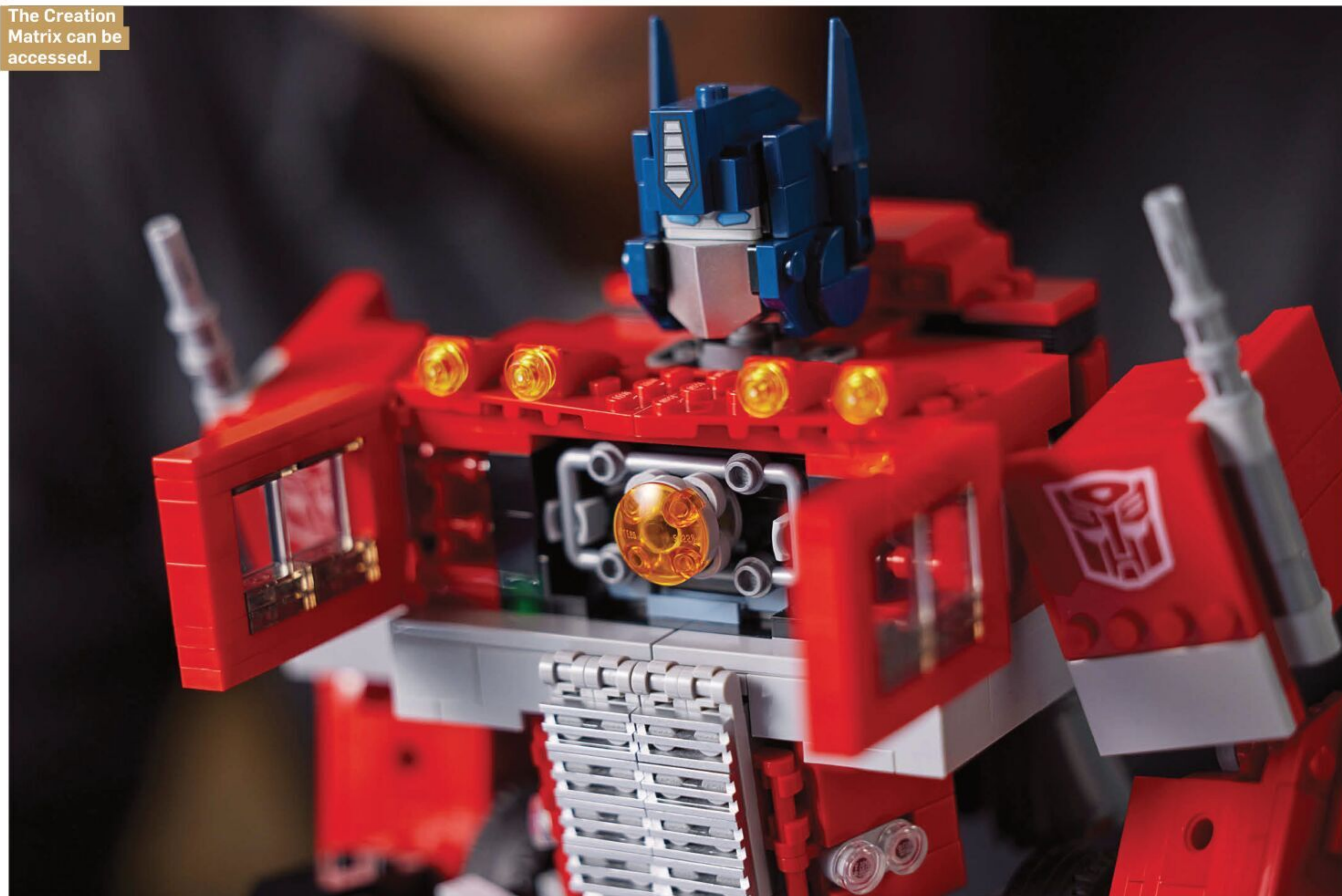


10302 Optimus Prime.





The Creation Matrix can be accessed.



The model transforms without being dismantled.





says Yoel.

A much more visible new element in the model is the head piece. 'It's the most Optimus Prime-y of the elements,' says Joseph. 'Yoel did a brilliant job of designing it so it isn't just Prime's face, it also fits into the LEGO DNA, hence it has already been used in other sets.'

The new element is only a slight modification to an existing one. 'We had the old roof tile but we needed a new mouth piece,' Yoel elaborates. 'The intention was that it should be a piece that could be used in other sets or by fans in other ways – this is why the profile, footprint and back profile were all designed to the same grid so it fits against a cheese slope. We tried to make it very Optimus Prime, but generic enough to be used in different ways.'

It's clear that the look of Prime had to be correct, with the drive behind the accuracy not only coming from Hasbro. 'We were very aligned in celebrating this iconic character in his most iconic form, at least, for our generation,' Joseph says.

The new faceplate is just one such example of where the design met the expectations of both the Hasbro and LEGO Group teams. It involved a different working relationship to most LEGO licensed sets but the clear vision – to recreate the original character in brick form – also presented challenges for Joseph: 'Balancing the toy and cartoon was tricky; the animated series took a lot of liberties compared to the original toy. The transformation is inspired by the toy – the arms move the same way, the head flips the same – where it's different is the location of the wheels on Prime's legs.'

The lower body transformation is different to the toy but more closely resembles the look of the cartoon version. 'Where it diverges from the toy, we went to the animation. One area in particular that took a lot of time to

get right was the front grille or the "Optimus abs". The flat front of the toy had to be more sculpted and dynamic looking in robot mode. A flat fronted robot made it look like Optimus had a pot belly and I had to give him a better look.'

Trying to match the cartoon and physical toy may have involved a couple of compromises, but they are ones Joseph is sure were worth taking. There is one area that was never up for debate though. 'It was always going to transform – I mean, it's in the name! We could have done something like we do with the 3-in-1 sets but we wanted to be more innovative. This was the number one priority for me, which may be why each component went through at least six iterations to get it right.'

Another area that Joseph was clear about was where stickers could – or couldn't – be used. 'I was clear where we needed prints and I fought for them,' he laughs. 'The communicator indicators on the arms couldn't be stickers because they would rub off with the gun, and those round hub caps stickers

can be a pain to apply so they had to be printed too. Obviously, the head and eyes had to be printed and getting the Autobots logo onto a printed element is a dream come true.'

It's entirely clear throughout the conversation that for Joseph and Yoel this was a passion project. Having such enthusiastic Transformers fans working on the set – with one of them having designed traditional Transformers toys for Hasbro – no doubt ensured that the finished G1 Optimus Prime would delight those who grew up transforming the original toy. For years toy-loving 1980s children have dreamt of the LEGO Group offering a Transformer, but because of the toy market's competitive nature it always seemed out of reach... with this new set, another geek fantasy has come to pass. ■

## ■ WHERE IT DIVERGES FROM THE TOY, WE WENT TO THE ANIMATION ■



As well as the figure, the set includes buildable accessories.



# WHY OLE KIRK MADE TOYS

Learn the full and fascinating story that reveals how Ole Kirk Kristiansen started making toys thanks to a series of unexpected circumstances

**Words:** Daniel Konstanski **Pics:** The LEGO Group

**T**HE GREAT DEPRESSION hit rural Denmark like a tidal wave. While the US stock market crash of October 29, 1929 made news around the world, remote places like Billund had little warning of the catastrophe coming their way. Economic malaise slowly spread throughout the world as nations grappled with how to handle the growing crisis. For Ole Kirk Kristiansen, the LEGO Group's founder, the Great Depression put him into a terrible position.

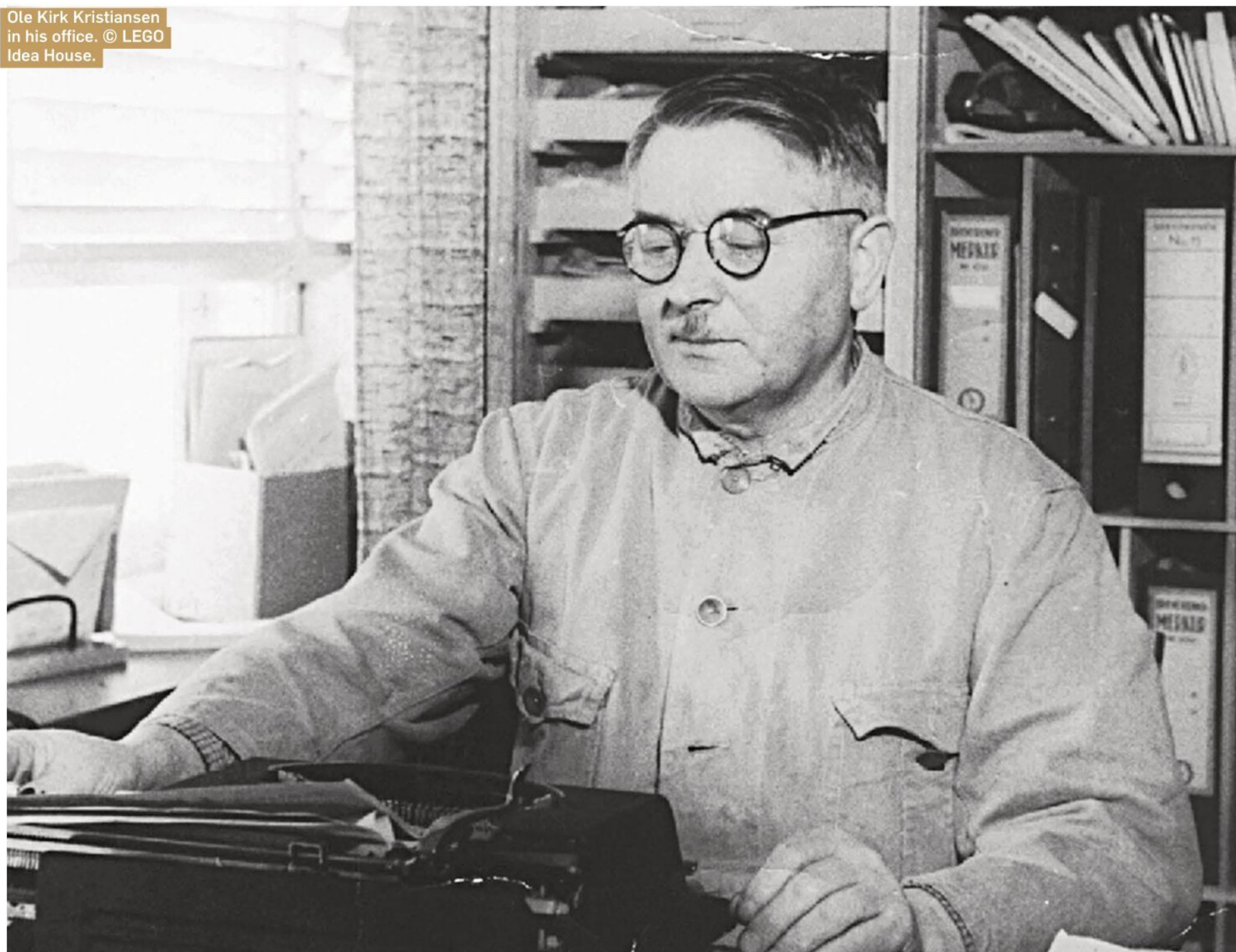
Denmark relied heavily on imports and exports. Being such a small country, its natural resources were limited – so Denmark's economy during the 1920s was largely built on exporting just a few products, primarily butter and pig meat. Building barns, dairies and farmhouses in support of these industries was Ole Kirk's main source of income, but there was

a catch. Like today, the raw materials for construction projects weren't cheap and had to be purchased upfront. In modern times, lines of credit and various forms of insurance exist to shield construction companies from the risk of buying materials for projects should they get cancelled, but in rural Denmark during the 1920s no such protections were available.

Instead, craftsmen had to take out personal or business loans – putting up their company's assets or even their own homes as collateral. If all went well, the proceeds from a project would be more than enough to pay these loans back when the job was completed. The Great Depression, however, was decidedly not a time when things went well and it began an unexpected and improbable chain of events that would ultimately lead to the LEGO brick.

When the crisis hit, Ole Kirk was in debt for materials purchased to

Ole Kirk Kristiansen in his office. © LEGO Idea House.

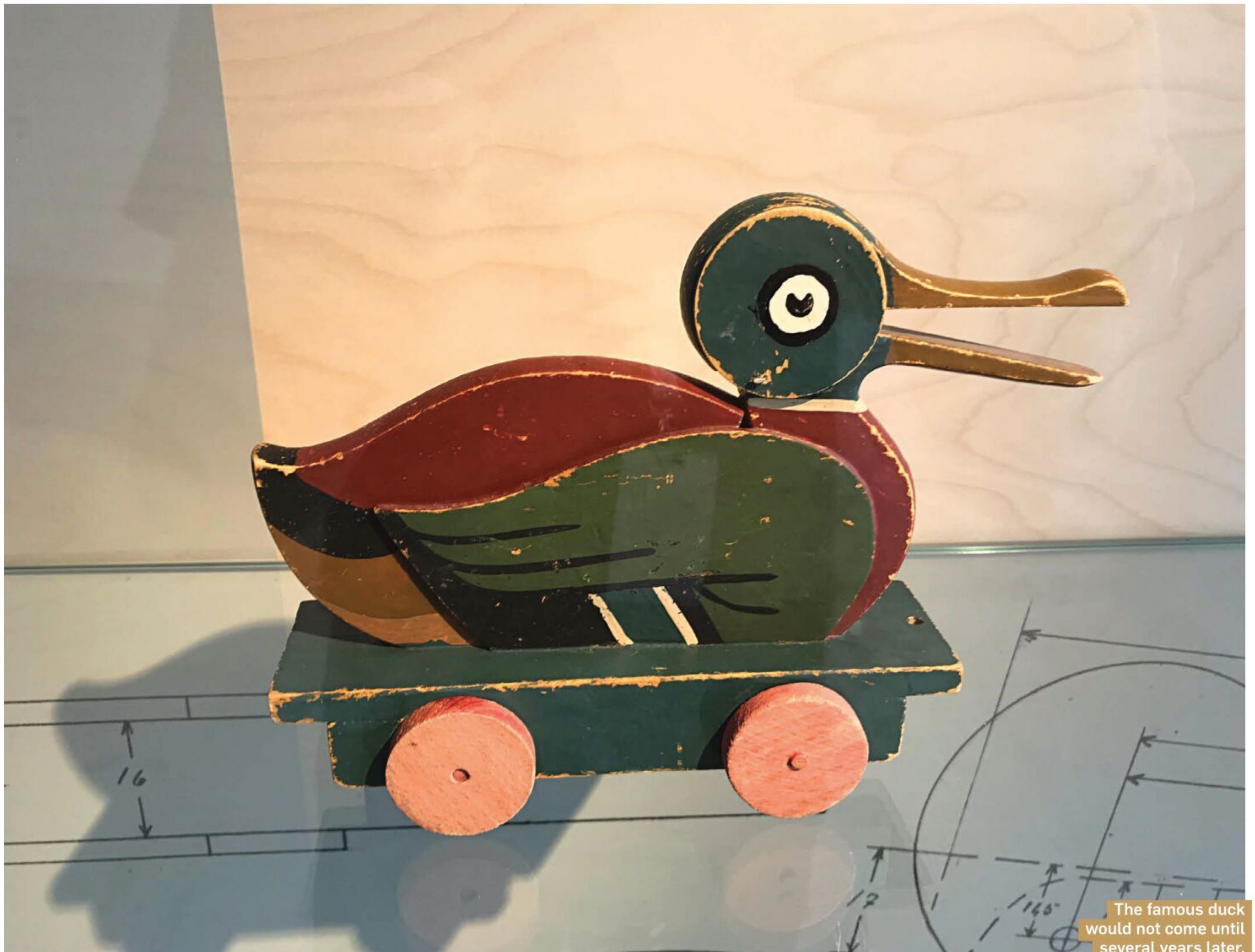




Wooden LEGO dog  
from the 1930s. ©  
LEGO Idea House.



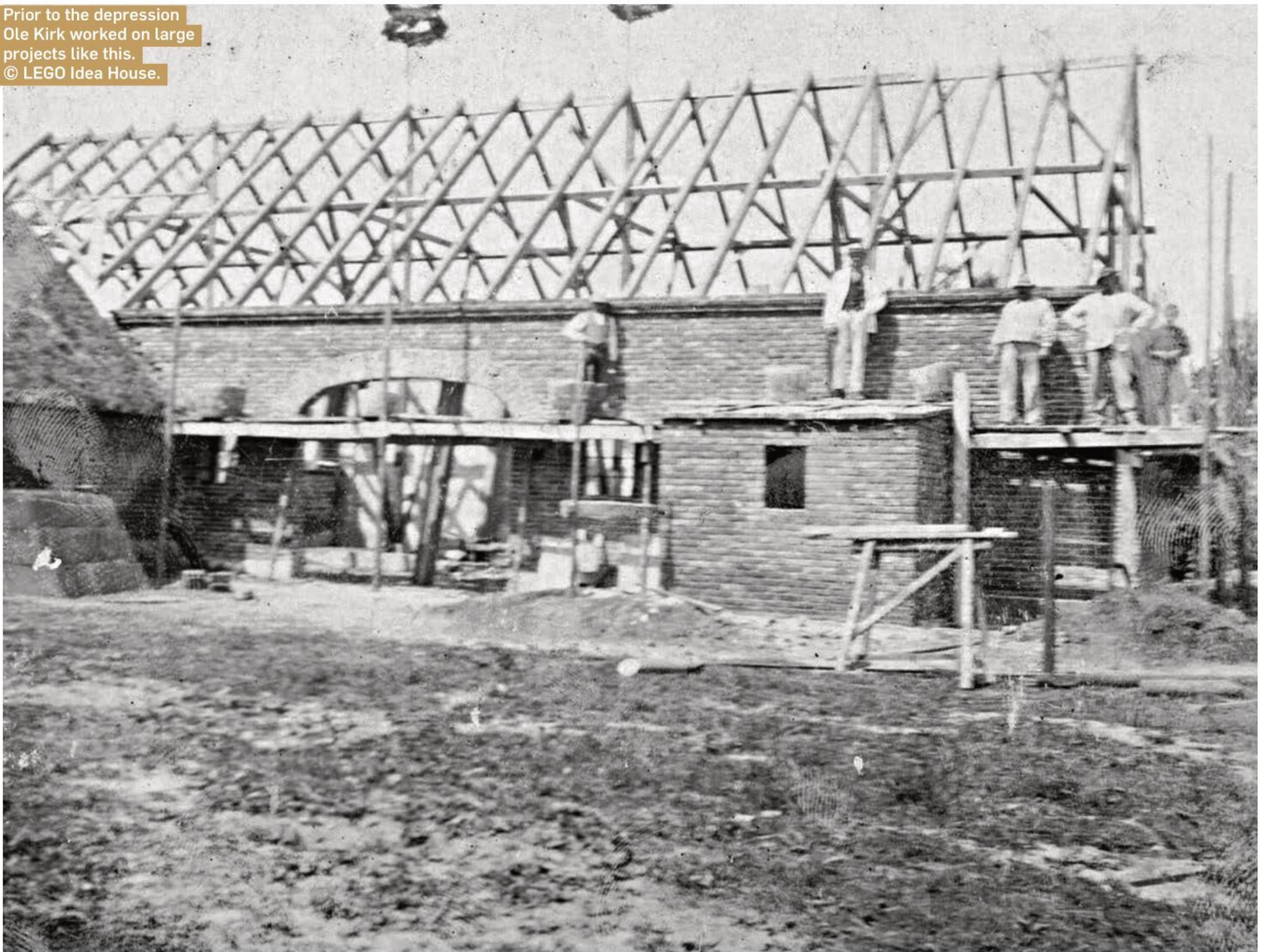
■ ■ IN AN EFFORT NOT TO WASTE ANY OF THE EXPENSIVE WOOD,  
OLE KIRK FASHIONED THEM INTO RUDIMENTARY TOYS ■ ■



The famous duck  
would not come until  
several years later.



Prior to the depression  
Ole Kirk worked on large  
projects like this.  
© LEGO Idea House.



Ole Kirk was in  
danger of losing his  
home. © LEGO Idea House.





complete projects and had used his own assets as collateral on the loans. Whether these materials were earmarked for a specific job or had been purchased in anticipation of unspecified future projects is not known. What is certain is that as 1932 dawned, creditors were breathing down his neck and Ole Kirk was in very real danger of losing everything to foreclosure just at the time that any prospect of substantive work evaporated. Furthermore, there was no welfare state or bailout assistance at this time. Years later, Ole Kirk's son Godtfred stated his belief that, had there been any sort of public assistance or welfare available, his father would never have taken the risk of making toys. This outside-the-box thinking was both forced upon Ole Kirk due to desperate times.

It turns out though that it was not actually his idea and not what he set out to do.

The LEGO Group's founder was part of an association that supported national manufacturing and sales of domestic goods called the National Association for Danish Enterprise. Today we would call this a trade, advocacy or lobbying group. The association sent out a publication to its various members. An article appeared in one of those magazines listing ideas for how to make ends meet in the trying times of the Great Depression. It advised woodworkers like Ole Kirk who couldn't get contracts for large buildings to try making readily marketable household goods like ladders, ironing boards, furniture and toys.

Some of the material Ole Kirk had on hand, purchased with the borrowed money that got him into this mess in the first place, was high quality beechwood. Billund's master carpenter had selected this wood himself for its fine quality and lack of knots. What Ole Kirk's original

plan was for this wood has been lost to history, but we do know what he decided to do with it – make furniture. Such high-quality wood should not be wasted, so Ole Kirk set his hand to make the next highest end thing he could think of in lieu of large construction projects. He assembled chests of drawers and cupboards, items that could be installed in farmhouses.

Those projects left scraps. Normally, such leftovers were collected and used as fuel for the fire, but these were not normal times. The scraps were too small for use as anything practical so, in an effort not to waste any of the expensive wood, Ole Kirk fashioned them into rudimentary toys almost as an afterthought. His plan was to create furniture and other household

items, not playthings. In fact, Godtfred would later recall that there was some judgement from both family members and neighbours who felt that producing toys for children was beneath such a skilled craftsman and they urged Ole Kirk to put his skills to better use.

Ole Kirk was familiar with the standards for furniture of the day, which called for three coats of varnish. Since his plan was to sell the furniture and household goods to friends and neighbours door to door, the quality had to be top notch. Accordingly, Ole Kirk's cupboards and chests got three coats they called for and, by dint of proximity and association, the toys did too. This practice would continue and is now looked back on, especially thanks to the proverbial story of Godtfred and the wooden ducks, as one of the earliest examples of the LEGO Group's commitment to quality. However, it almost certainly began as simply doing to the toys the same thing that was being done to the furniture.

The practice stuck even after the toys beat out all other products. Young

## OLE KIRK QUICKLY DIVERTED WOOD THAT WAS EARMARKED FOR FURNITURE AND HOUSEHOLD GOODS TO TOYS



Ole Kirk, his wife Kristine and two guests. © LEGO Idea House.



Godtfred, who attempted to save money by skipping a layer of lacquer only to be admonished by his father, had a valid point in that spending extra money to meet standards for a completely different class of products made little fiscal sense. While there is no doubt Ole Kirk prized quality, this may be another example of him not entirely understanding the monetary implications of certain decisions.

That could well have been the end of the story were it not for a chance encounter during the summer. A wholesaler from the town of Fredericia by the name of Jens W. Olesen happened to be traveling through the area and stopped by Ole Kirk's workshop completely unannounced. At this time, wholesalers essentially served as middleman between craftsmen and stores. This was long before the age of retail chains and professional buyers. Craftsmen didn't have time to hawk their wares and general stores throughout the small towns didn't have time to set up lots of regular supply chains. Accordingly, wholesalers would buy up stock from craftsmen and then sell it in bulk quantities to shop owners in cities and towns.

When Jens strolled into Ole Kirk's shop that day, several of the toys were sitting there, quite possibly because Ole Kirk hadn't even tried to sell them as he was focusing on furniture and household goods. The wholesaler was immediately interested as he believed that parents would be looking to give their children a reprieve from the dark economic times with little niceties and Ole Kirk's small toys made from scrap wood perfectly fit the bill. To the craftsman's surprise and relief, the wholesaler placed a large order for more of the toys. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, so Ole Kirk quickly diverted wood that was earmarked for furniture and household goods to toys to fulfil the order. Then came disaster.

A couple of months later when everything was ready for delivery, Ole Kirk discovered to his horror that Jens had gone out of business – leaving him, once again, holding the financial bag. Precious material and resources had been put into those toys and he had to get a return on them. His local market in Billund could not absorb so many products. Out of necessity,

the LEGO Group's founder packed them all up and drove around in his old Ford car to nearby towns, checking in with every shop owner to try and sell them.

Ole Kirk was successful in selling all the toys, but shop owners were not in a much better place financially than he was. Because of that, few of them could pay him in actual money. Instead, he was compensated primarily in food stuffs, including a bag of soft-shell almonds that must have stood out to Godtfred for some reason as it was the one specific example he would recall many years later. Such agricultural payments may have been fine if all Ole Kirk was trying to do was put food on the table for his family, but his creditors would clearly not accept almonds.

All told, according to records he sold only DKK 4,000 worth of products (about £10,000 accounting for inflation). That wouldn't have been enough money even if all payments had been in actual currency. The situation eventually came to a head at the end of 1932 when Ole Kirk's loans were

called in and he couldn't pay, sliding into bankruptcy.

With foreclosure imminent, he drove around with his lawyer to different family members and successfully convinced nine people to stand surety on a loan to bail him out. Several of them used the opportunity to encourage him to

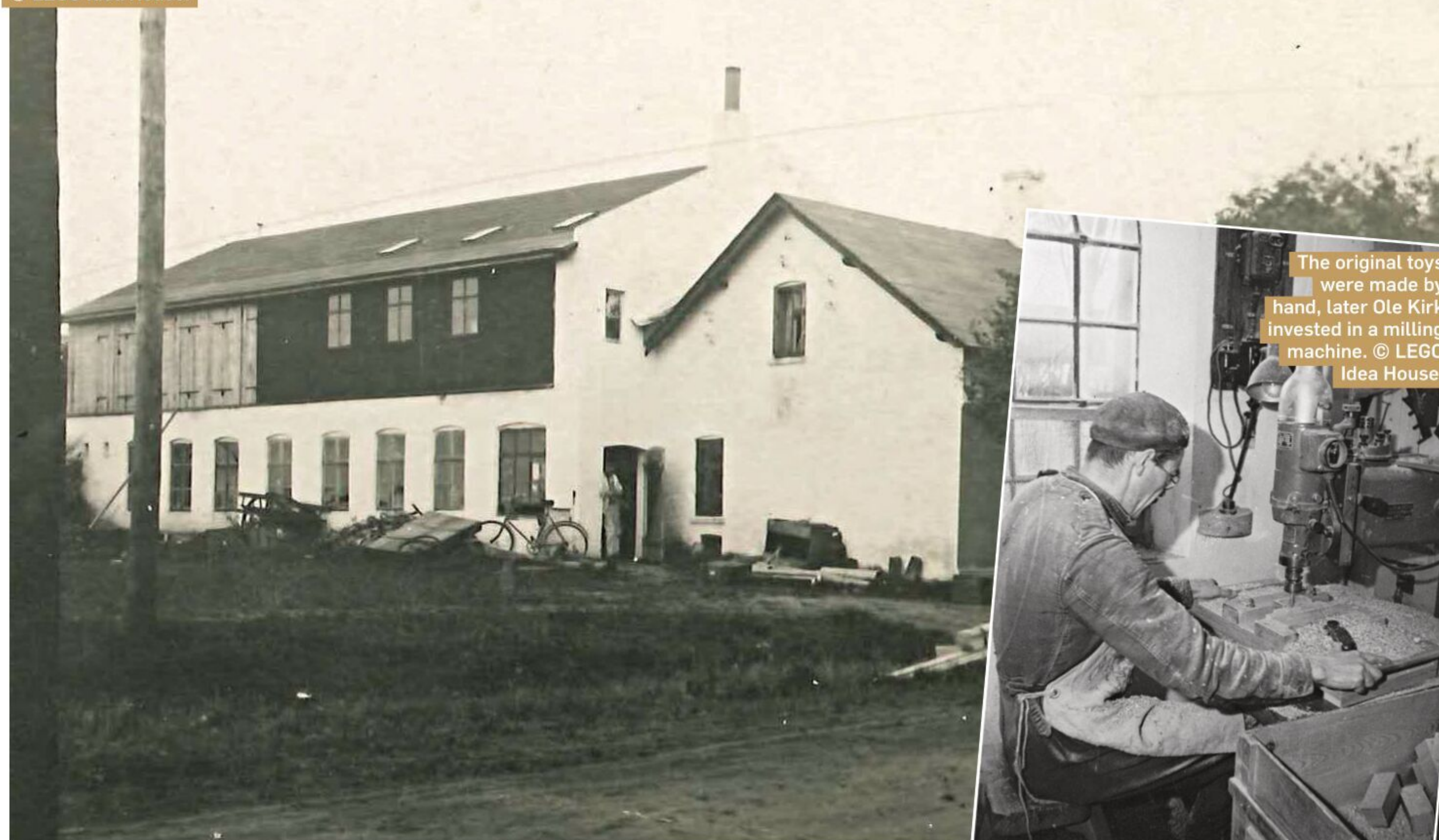
use the bailout as a fresh start and do something more worthy of his skill than make toys. However, Ole Kirk had seen an opportunity. While the toys hadn't all sold for money, they had all sold – lending credence to the wholesaler's belief that parents would want relief for their children in even the most dire of financial times. That experience of being able to move all the toys Jens had failed to pay for convinced Ole Kirk that there was at least some future in the toy making business.

'It wasn't until the day I told myself "you'll either have to drop your old craft or put toys out of your head" that I began to see the long-term consequences. And the decision turned out to be the right one,' the founder wrote when reflecting on his decision later.

And that's the real story of why Ole Kirk Kristiansen started to make toys – and the reason that the LEGO Group exists today. ■

## THE SITUATION EVENTUALLY CAME TO A HEAD AT THE END OF 1932 WHEN OLE KIRK'S LOANS WERE CALLED IN ■■

Ole Kirk's workshop.  
© LEGO Idea House.





Examples of the first wooden toys are rare, but they likely looked like these from several years later.





# LEGO SERIOUS PLAY: AN INTRODUCTORY EXERCISE

Leading a LEGO SERIOUS PLAY workshop is not as easy as it sounds, but Michel Cloosterman has an outline if you would like to try leading an activity. Have serious fun with it...

## THE EXERCISE:

- Put together a group of four people.
- Make sure you have a colourful collection of all kinds of LEGO bricks.
- Each participant selects about 75 pieces for the other participants.

## THE CHALLENGE:

- Each participant gets four minutes to build a tower however they like (they don't have to use all of the bricks).
- Each participant in turn explains something about their tower (it could be the shape/colour choice/meaning).

## THE INQUIRY:

Participants then ask each other about their builds using these examples or by coming up with original questions:

- The LEGO brick you put on top of the tower, did you deliberately pick that brick and are you willing to share why that one?
- If you could change one thing about the tower, what would it be? Please elaborate on your choice.
- The tower contains multiple coloured bricks. Does this have any meaning for you?
- You need to take a meaningful brick out of the tower. Which one would that be? Take it out and share your experience.





# PLAY GETS SERIOUS

Michel Cloosterman and Stephen Walling explain how LEGO SERIOUS PLAY helps communicators around the world

**Words:** Kyle Born **Pics:** Michel Cloosterman, Stephen Walling, the LEGO Group

**MOST ADULT LEGO** fans are faithful in their devotion to playing with their beloved bricks but would stop short of saying they're 'serious' about it. Suggesting that this play is anything other than joyful is probably going too far.

That might make it a surprise that there's an entire training industry built around LEGO SERIOUS PLAY (LSP). It's a development option for workplaces that intends to encourage innovation, get colleagues communicating and improve performance. Unlike the immersed readers of this magazine, participants in LSP workshops are often those who haven't ever played with LEGO bricks at all – or at least haven't since childhood.

'The LEGO SERIOUS PLAY method is accessible for everyone,' says Michel Cloosterman, trainer at Bricks and Business in the Netherlands. 'It doesn't discriminate – not in people, not in culture, not in anything. Actually it levels the playing field for those who are part of a workshop. Those who have a hard time listening to others might be really challenged during the workshop.'

LSP is a technique encompassing thinking, communication and problem solving using hands-on visual and interactive methodology; that

methodology is anchored by the LEGO bricks at the centre of the sessions.

Here's how it works when you join a workshop; a LSP facilitator hands out a small assortment of bricks to each person. After an introduction, the facilitator gives instruction on what to build and explains how it relates to you. It might be, 'what is your role at work?'. How you go about interpreting and building that is up to you. After a few minutes, construction concludes.

One by one, participants show off their build and explains their thought process behind their creation.

'Besides the fact that the participants bring new ideas and insights to the table by building models in a creative way, they will also be stimulated to use their intuition and imagination,' Michel explains. 'A workshop has to be facilitated

by an experienced facilitator who knows the method inside and out. If facilitated well, the process of building and sharing will amaze people with the insights that come out of it – almost like a touch of magic.'

It was the academics Johan Roos and Bart Victor who came up with the concept of LEGO SERIOUS PLAY in the mid-1990s, but it was tough for them to convince the LEGO Group that it was something the company should explore. While adults have been embraced more as time has gone

**THIS TYPE OF COMMUNICATION PREDATES HUMAN LANGUAGE**



Michel Cloosterman, facilitator at Bricks and Business.



on, the LEGO Group's core focus has always been on children. A decision was made to embrace the concept, leading to the company licensing partners who could train other facilitators as well as producing special boxes of bricks specifically designed for the programme.

In 2010, the LEGO Group stopped licensing partners for SERIOUS PLAY methodology and made the supporting documentation open source.

Since then, the community of facilitators has continued to thrive – and although the company no longer has involvement in the execution of LSP, related products are still available from the LEGO online shop

One of the primary reasons individuals and businesses engage in LSP is to improve communication. The structure of the methodology allows everyone to have a say and a place at the table.

'Harnessing the power of a 3D tool like LEGO SERIOUS PLAY allows people to take a deep dive into a topic and create powerful insights, which team members can quickly and effectively communicate,' says Stephen Walling, trainer at Strategic Play in Canada. 'It also creates a safe environment for everyone and removes hierarchies, which can limit creativity and insight. An added benefit to LSP is improved trust, which I think we can all agree is essential to communication in team settings. One of the best ways for humans to communicate is in 3D, because this type of

communication predates human language. It is brain-friendly.'

LSP methodology combines visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic learning styles into one uniquely creative and powerful approach. It enables people – both introverts and extroverts – to think with their hands and better communicate their ideas, allowing a greater flow of information.

'People actually get to hear and see what others are saying,' Stephen

says. 'This is the perfect tool to get everyone excited about thinking creatively. Everyone bonds and actively participates as they problem solve together, all while having fun in an environment that encourages free idea generation.'

Even in such an idyllic setting, participants aren't necessarily lining up to board the LSP train. That's when the facilitator steps up to

give everyone a reason to hop aboard.

'Participants' initial attitudes range from "what is this?! I have real work to do," to "awesome! I just built the new race car kit last weekend",' says Walling. 'It is the facilitator's job to take any participant scepticism and turn it into constructive results. This is fairly easy to do. You simply answer the age-old question, "what's in this for me?" and demonstrate the power of LSP with the formulation of powerful questions and going through the methodology.'

One of the great strengths of LSP is that it gives everyone in the room

### THE PROCESS OF BUILDING AND SHARING WILL AMAZE PEOPLE WITH THE INSIGHTS THAT COME OUT OF IT



Teams can problem solve together during LSP sessions.



A good facilitator ensures that everyone can contribute.



## WHY DO PRACTITIONERS USE LEGO SERIOUS PLAY?

From the facilitator/practitioner point-of-view, the process of supporting the participants in a workshop is structured and always consists of four steps:

- The facilitator challenges the participants with a question
- The facilitator indicates the time they have to create a model
- The facilitator makes sure that everyone explains their created model
- The facilitator asks questions for further explanation

Although these aspects are led by the facilitator, it is the experience of the participants that is most important part. 'The dynamic comes from the models and the participants,' says Michel Cloosterman said. 'They are the key, not the facilitator.'



The play aspect breaks down barriers.



## HOW DOES LEGO SERIOUS PLAY IMPROVE COMMUNICATION?

Participants build models as a response to a challenging question without any further instruction or example. There is no booklet that shows them how to start, proceed or what the result should be. It is all about imagination and creativity. The result of their effort is a model they created themselves, which captures a meaningful insight on the challenging question. The model has become a metaphor with a story in it. The advantages of a metaphorical model are:

- It helps to reduce complexity because it only consists of the relevant issues.
- The models is a summary of relevant information.
- Everything that the participant wants to tell can be shown – models are a visualisation of their intentions.
- The meaning comes from the person that builds it, not their colleagues, not the expert, not their manager or leader.

Participants use  
an eclectic mix  
of bricks.



Participants talk  
through their  
models.





an opportunity to be heard, especially those who would normally be left out of conversations simply due to their temperament.

'I love to share my story of the "lonely guy"; Michel says. 'The people in an organisation who deliver but are not really heard. They're easy to oversee. In this case, my lonely guy was the quiet, contemplative type. The issue for the workshop was to create new opportunities, because their department was closing down within a year. The near future was quite uncertain for the participants. This lonely guy made a breakthrough during the workshop. He showed his colleagues a way out of uncertainty by building bridges towards other people and departments, through creating a professional network for new opportunities. It was amazing what happened with the energy in the group! It broke down walls and created a fantastic view into a possible future.'

Giving quiet bridge builders a voice empowers them and their team. In some cases, the methods used in LSP can even alter an entire city.

'We are very proud of the work we did with the City of Surrey in British Columbia, Canada, as they sought solutions to reduce poverty in their community,' Stephen enthuses. 'During a retreat, the city leadership team identified that a lack of affordable childcare was a contributing factor. Combined with related issues, difficulties accessing childcare made it tough for parents to work, which negatively impacted their families. The

team members brainstormed by building LEGO models of their ideas to address the problem. They arrived at a solution they all agreed had great potential – changing the process of issuing building licenses to include plans for cooperative childcare centres.'

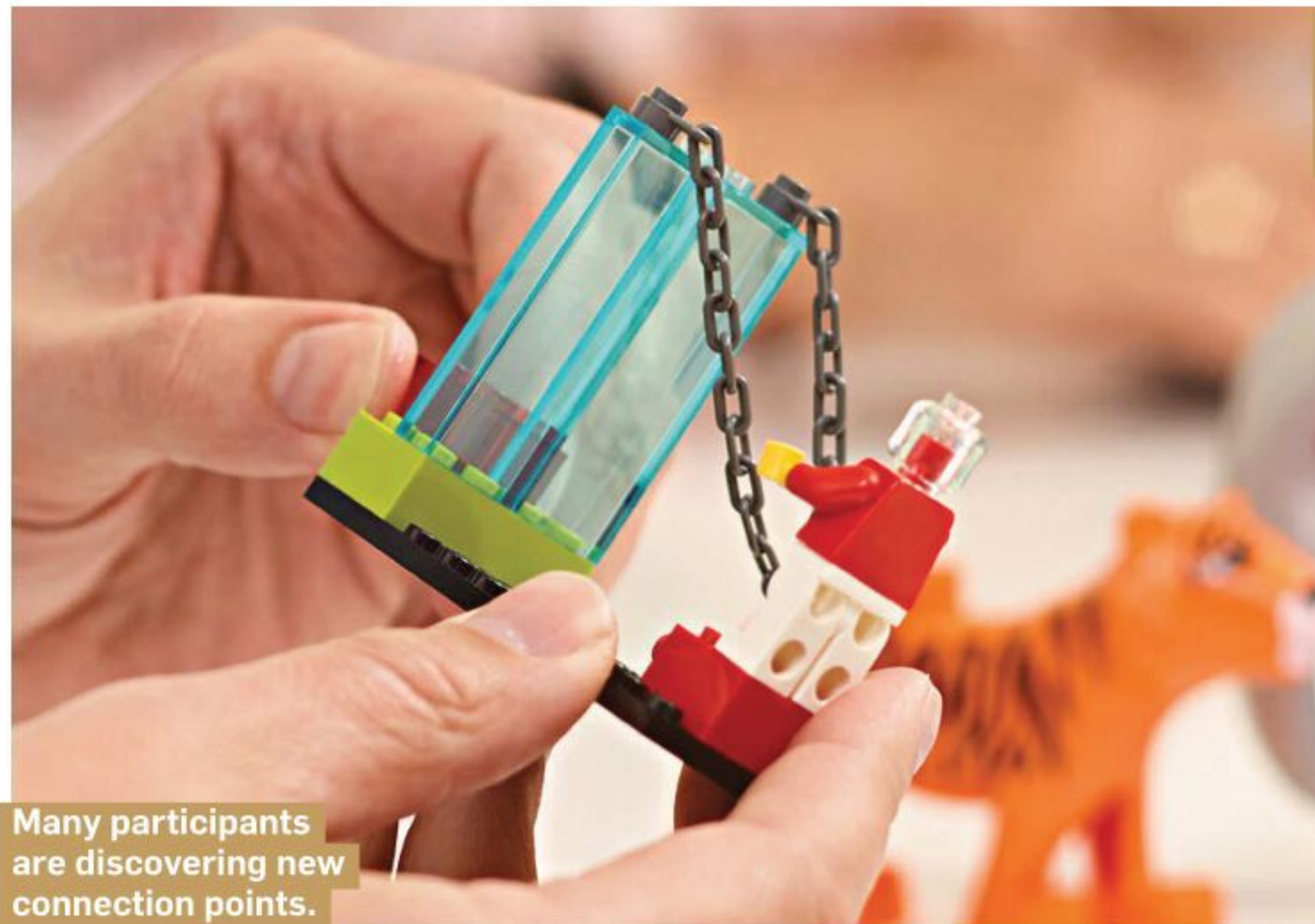
'Stephen led our team through the LEGO SERIOUS PLAY problem-solving model, which stretched our thinking and perceptions of innovation in ways that we didn't expect,' says Falina Stack, organizational development manager at the City of Surrey, who was part of that

workshop. 'The outcome was a highly engaged team that felt that they had all contributed to solving sticky problems with tangible outputs that were immediately usable by the city. The City of Surrey consistently works to

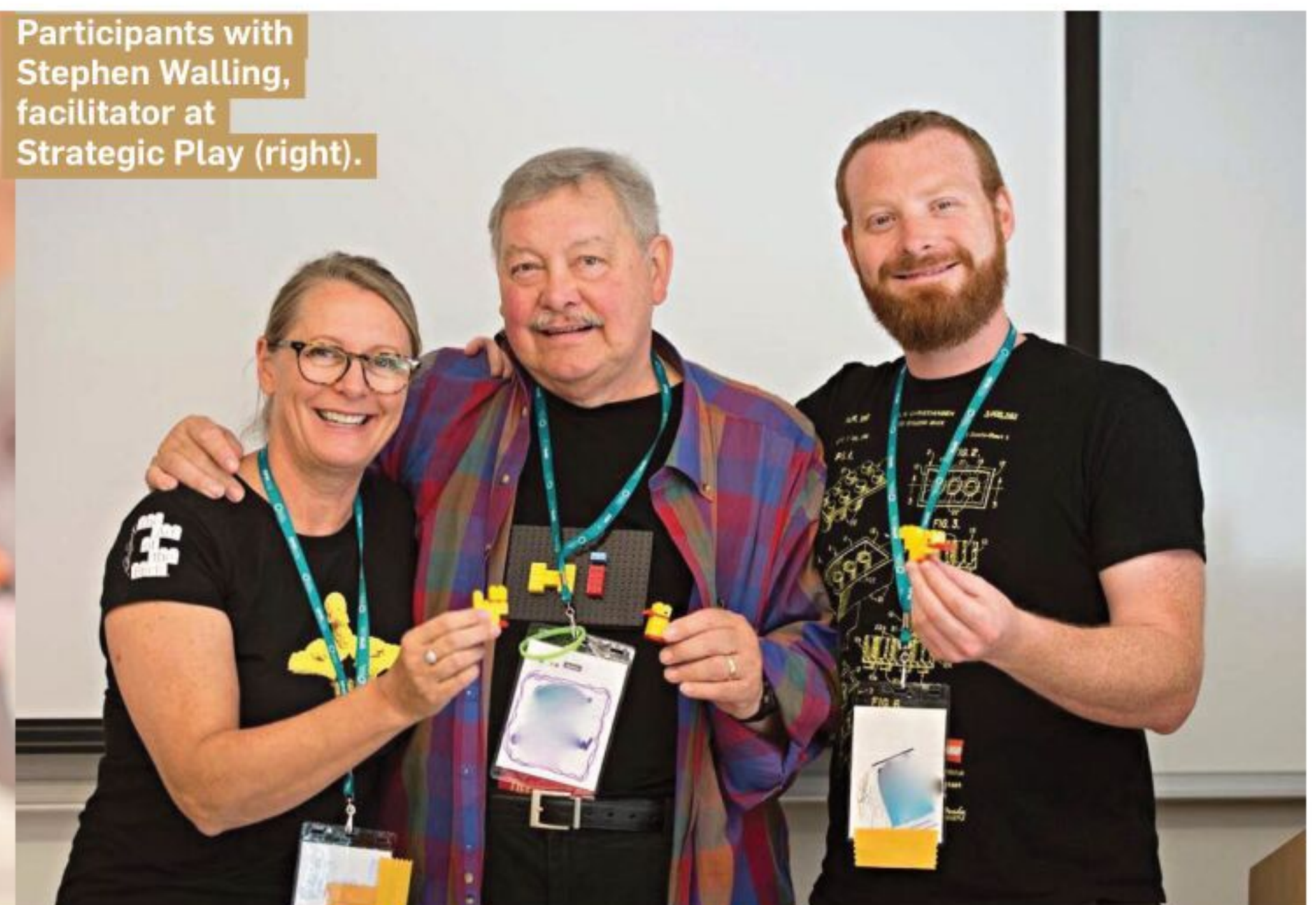
innovate in an effort to best serve our residents in an evolving landscape. Not only did the sessions stretch us as a team, they reshaped the way that we approach challenges as a city.'

As many a LEGO devotee has discovered, it's not so much about the bricks themselves, but what the brick-built creation means to the person who built it. Seeing problems broken down with LEGO bricks gives creative problem solvers the visualisation necessary to see a viable solution, and LSP offers this opportunity in an encouraging setting. Stephen sums it succinctly: 'LEGO SERIOUS PLAY methodology is about the story, not the build.' ■

## THE TEAM MEMBERS BRAINSTORMED BY BUILDING LEGO MODELS OF THEIR IDEAS



Many participants are discovering new connection points.



Participants with Stephen Walling, facilitator at Strategic Play (right).



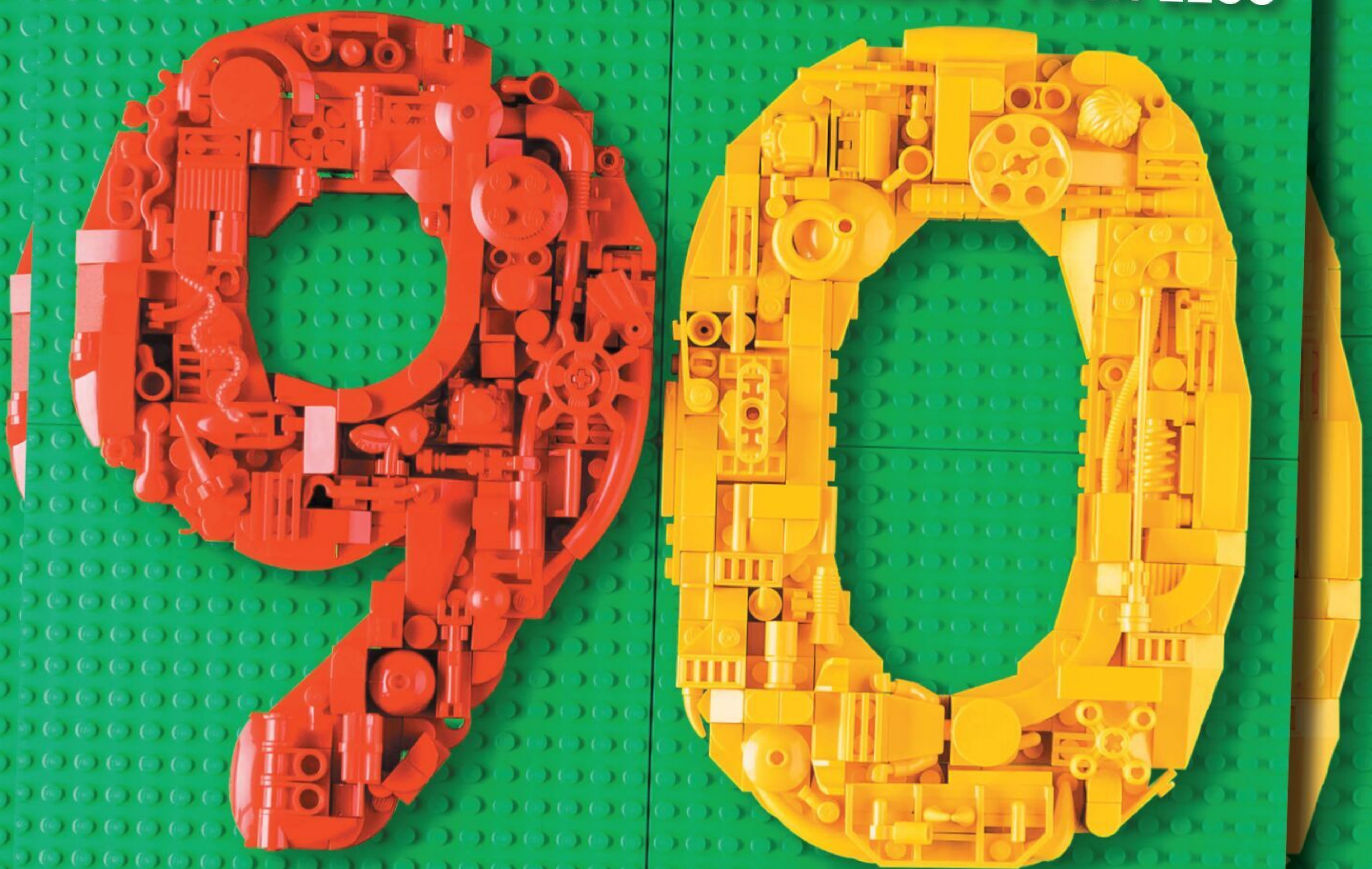
These beloved bricks are being used for workplace training.



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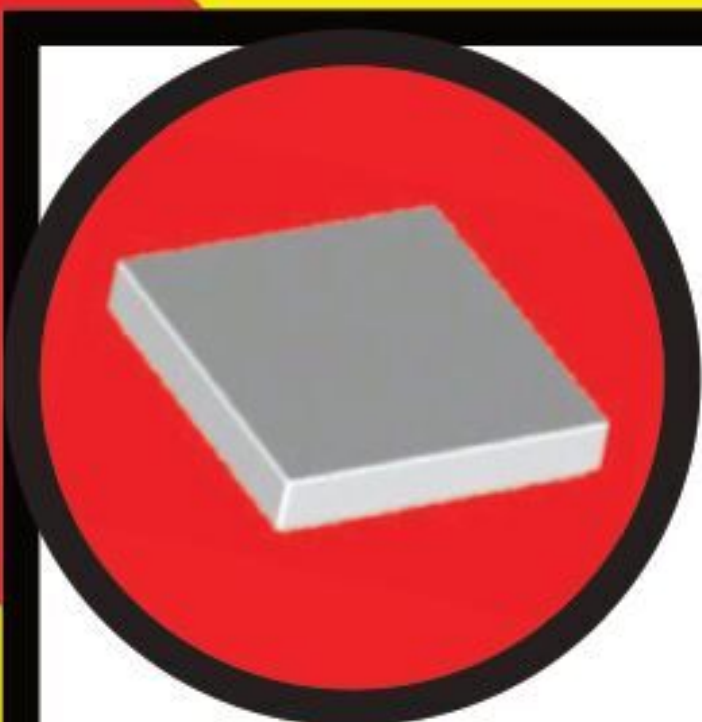


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# 10302 OPTIMUS PRIME

The first official LEGO Transformer is much more than meets the eye

**Words:** Dave Cartlidge **Pics:** Phil Wrighton

**IT ACTUALLY HAPPENED.** An official LEGO Transformer. Not only that, it's Optimus Prime. If you're looking at the images and thinking that this is the Optimus Prime you remember, rather than the flame-decorated version from the astoundingly popular Michael Bay slow-motion-explode-a-thon franchise, then this is the set for you.

To be clear, this is an 18+ set. That's probably not because it's incredibly challenging to build or in any way unsuitable for non-adults, but because anyone under the age of 18 simply won't have the affinity and connection to the source material that this set so heavily draws upon. If you're still undecided about whether you want a LEGO Optimus Prime in your collection, then the only conclusion is, if you were a fan of Gobots... you poor thing.

As with many of the LEGO sets based on licences from the 1980s, there's no shortage of MOCs out there. There's a clear interest and passion for recreating childhood favourites,

but treading the line between an affordable, functional, and fun set and keeping the wider fanbase happy is a very difficult challenge – thankfully LEGO Senior Designer Joseph

**ANYONE UNDER THE AGE OF 18 SIMPLY WON'T HAVE THE AFFINITY AND CONNECTION TO THE SOURCE MATERIAL**

Patrick Kyde, himself a former Transformers toy designer for Hasbro, has risen to this challenge. From the moment you see the Hasbro and Takara Tomy logos on the box alongside the LEGO one, there is a sense that this is a special set for more reasons than just the contents.

The build is immediately notable for the relatively few Technic elements it uses to

accomplish the transformation mechanism. While the major joints use a combination of socket joints and newly designed elements, Optimus is largely composed of System elements – a testament to the versatility that the LEGO System offers, if nothing else.

Prime is built in his robot form, starting with his iconic truck cab chest. Grey and red elements combine perfectly to build a convincing recreation of the on-screen Prime and the angled windows hide a chamber to store the Matrix of Leadership. It's not long before the shapes are immediately recognisable as the Autobot leader, even before any limbs or details are added, and the scale of the finished robot starts to become apparent. The completed Prime stands over 30cm tall and, although not as large as Voltron, feels like the correct scale and is very well considered.

The newly designed socket elements and Technic joints are used to good effect. Existing elements could have been used to accomplish



The truck is based on the Freightliner FL86.



Does this  
jetpack make  
my butt look  
big?





the same feat, but the current range of parts would have been too cumbersome to fit inside such a compact frame and the overall look of Prime would have been at risk. The shoulders and arms are particularly well realised. A new socket element is hinged to allow the rotation needed for transformation (in case you'd forgotten, Prime's arms become the sides and wheel arches of the truck cab) and clever use of bars and plates within the chest help hold them in place in both modes.

The arms also come with some new printed elements, both of which will be sure to bring a smile to the builder. Two 4x4 tiles with the Autobot logo proudly sit atop Prime's shoulders and a printed communicator tile sits neatly on each forearm. This is a testament to the ideals of the designer, ensuring that printed elements are used where they are most practical and, almost as importantly, where you would most want them to be. As with other LEGO models, the mantra is that the set should look good even if the stickers aren't applied. In this case, the very few included stickers definitely meet that brief.

One area that would have been criminal to have used stickers is the head. In this case, two

new printed elements are used for the eyes and forehead, as well as a newly designed part for the face plate. This silver element is similar to the existing roof tile part but with a slightly different squared-off profile that captures the robot

## GREY AND RED ELEMENTS COMBINE PERFECTLY TO BUILD A CONVINCING RECREATION

aesthetics brilliantly. The head is immediately recognisable and superbly put together, even including the same transformation mechanism from the G1 toy where it flips backwards, inside the cab of the truck.

The legs are a great example of where the LEGO set differs from the source material to good effect. The legs of the 1984 toy version simply 'collapsed' underneath the cab to form the rear section of the tractor and fifth-wheel coupling. This meant that the wheels were at the front of the robot legs, which would

become ground-facing when in truck form. On-screen, things were slightly different with the result being that the wheels were at the rear of the legs, making the robot look better in the cartoon and less truck-like than the toy. The LEGO version takes the best of both worlds and manages to look like the cartoon version and make a convincing truck by using a 180-degree rotation to the waist as part of the conversion. A Technic pin and turntable at the core of the waist are the key components involved here and while not strictly accurate to the toy or animation, this offers the perfect balance of both.

There are other examples of deviation from the classic toy, such as the way the gorgeous brick-built ion cannon appears to be gripped by Prime's hand but is actually held in place by two studs on his arm. This is an improvement over the original toy that couldn't hold the gun correctly in his fist. Those fists were a major flaw in the G1 toy, having to be removed to form the truck headlights, and finding a 1984 toy with both fists today is quite a rarity. The animation had the luxury of making them vanish inside the forearms but the LEGO solution, of folding them underneath the wrist,



Once built, the model transforms without disassembly.



is elegant and ingenious. There is one notable change that purists may scoff at; the truck form features a stickered number plate tile that becomes Prime's waist. The cartoon used some between-frame trickery to change this to a yellow box that the LEGO version achieves through replacing the tile. It's the only part of the completed set that isn't strictly part of the transformation and while it does feel like a compromise it doesn't detract from the looks in either mode and is completely optional. Creating a mechanism to somehow flip the number plate seems like it would add much more complexity for very little value.

Within the build there are numerous examples of clever techniques and smart use of parts in confined spaces that pepper the build experience and keep it interesting. Spread across 10 bags, the 1,508 parts are all used efficiently and smartly – so much so that the actual build doesn't take as long as you might expect. As far as the build flow is concerned, this is a set that races by and never feels like a chore.

## VERDICT

A dream come true for Transformers and LEGO fans alike. The superb display set doesn't disappoint.

# 92/100

The accessories are also very well selected and complement the set brilliantly. Sometimes there are grumblings that accessories are added to sets so that the part count increases to justify the price – if that's ever the case, it isn't here. The superb blaster, Matrix, energon cube, energy axe and rocket pack are brilliantly put together, adding real value and display options to the build.

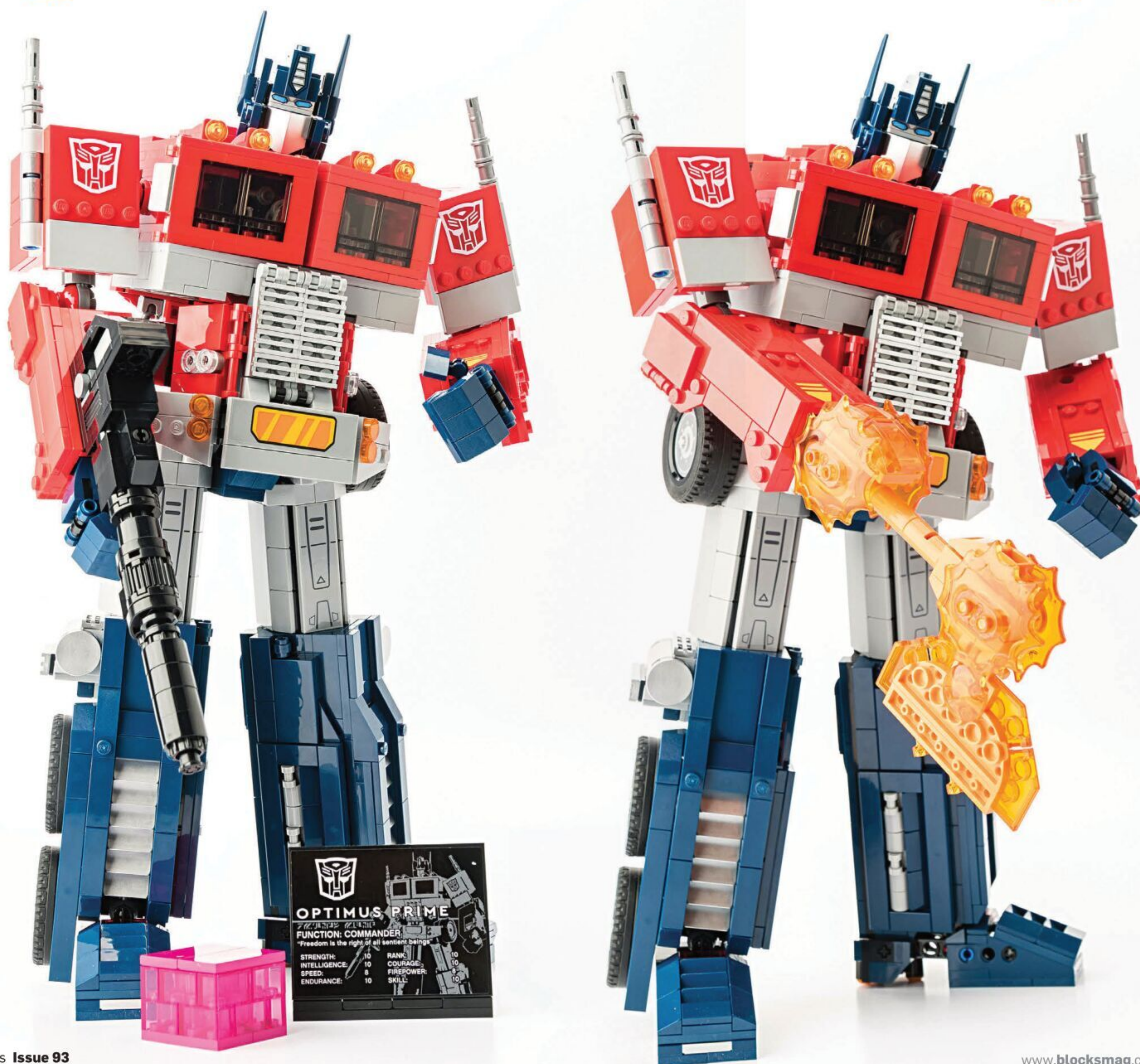
Optimus the robot looks every bit as good as you'd hope. The legs and arms have a good degree of articulation and the addition of ankles makes it a much more posable robot. The feet are sturdy and rubber-soled, making them grippy enough to stand in most positions. Unfortunately the weight of the gun does seem too much for the arms to take and

having it in an upright position doesn't last for very long. The truck version is a very passable vehicle, albeit a little gappy in places, with the clever way the front grille changes its angle to represent both the flat-fronted truck and robo-abs being especially pleasing.

The transformation process is pretty simple and reminiscent of the G1 toy. This is possibly the weakest area of the LEGO version, however, as some smaller parts have a desire to ping across the room when the model is being moved. The rotating waist can feel especially fragile at first but is easily pushed back into place and never comes fully apart.

None of these shortcomings detracts from the overall experience and the amount of technical ingenuity that's gone into creating this set is worthy of admiration. LEGO Optimus Prime is a perfect visual blend of the cartoon, comics and the original toy. It's not a replica of any one of these but is its own incarnation of the iconic character. For anyone who's a fan of the original cartoon or toy, this is a must have. ■

## ■ THIS IS A SET THAT RACES BY AND NEVER FEELS LIKE A CHORE ■





The Matrix of Leadership is included.



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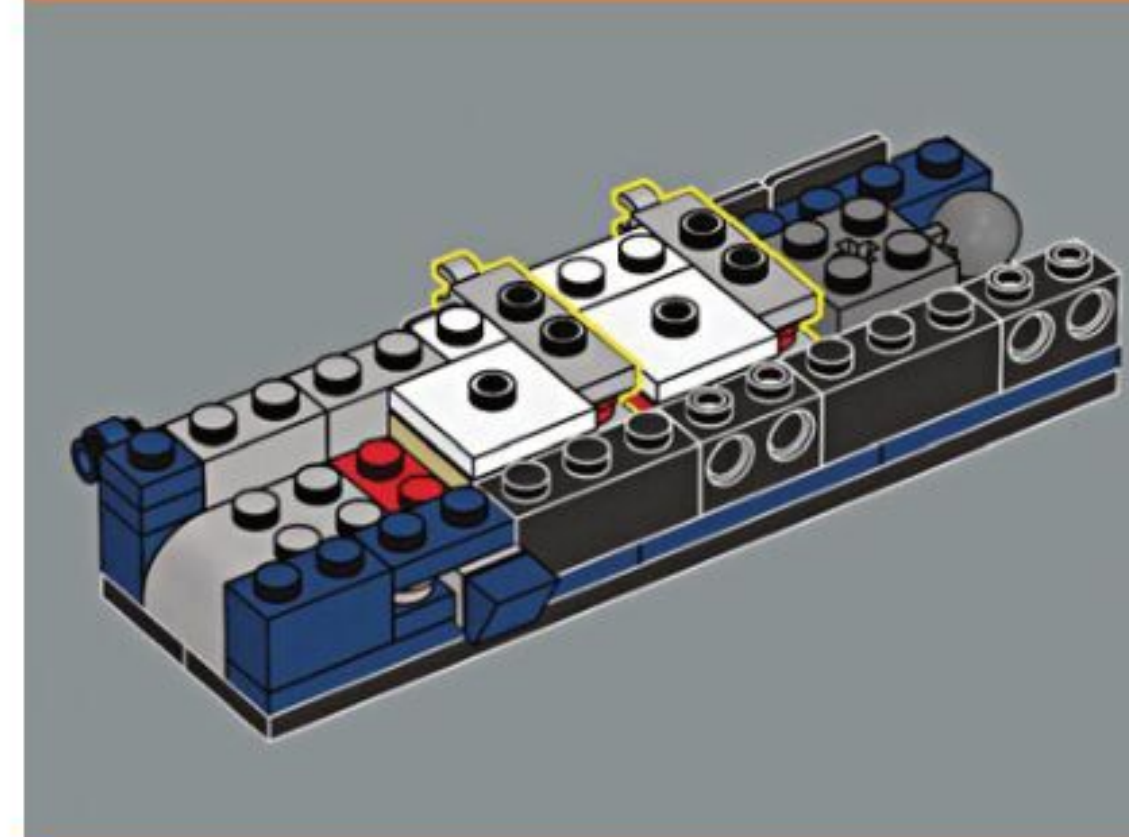
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**Price:** £149.99, \$169.99, €169.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 2,316

## 21333 STARRY NIGHT

Does 21333 Starry Night shine as bright as the original fan submission?

**Words & Pics:** Kat Rees-Jauke





A star  
is born.





**BASED ON HIS** memories of the night sky and the view from his asylum window, Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night* is the artist's most recognisable work. It has inspired people to look up at the stars in a completely different way, and other artists to compose works in homage to its unique impressionist swirls and colours. While Van Gogh deemed the painting a failure, not even thinking worth selling, it now takes pride of place at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. It was LEGO fan designer Truman Cheng's love for this painting that made him recreate it in the brick, and 21333 *Starry Night* remains very true to both the original submission and the actual painting itself.

For anyone looking for a LEGO challenge then 21333 is the answer. This is a difficult set to build and will take concentration from even the most experienced builders. It is made unlike any other LEGO model, with only the frame slightly reminiscent of the Art range. Indeed, its closest resemblance is to a shadow puppet theatre or a scene in a box frame because of the different layers that are set in front of each other. This doesn't come across that clearly on the box art, but the layers are much more definitive in real life.

To achieve these layers there is a lot of plate stacking. In most sets this would become extremely repetitive, losing its appeal quickly, yet 21333 is a build that's easy to become engrossed in. Different plates have to be stacked correctly to recreate the curving shapes of the

landscape, and tiles are dotted around precisely so that everything will align. While there are some spares if a mistake is made, the many similar colours make patience a definite virtue, as going back to fix anything would be incredibly frustrating. The effect is well worth the effort once the swirling lines and blocky brushstrokes start to take shape.

At the base of the painting is a small town believed to be inspired by a local Provençal village and the Dutch towns of Van Gogh's homeland, as it was not part of the view he was painting. Most of the houses use the same

## **MOST OF THE LAYERS ARE MINI BUILDS THAT ATTACH ONCE COMPLETED**

technique as *Architecture Skylines*, combining 1x1 plates with triangular tiles as little roofs. Those in the foreground use clever stacking of corner plates attached onto a lightsaber blade to make them look bigger and closer to the viewer. It's one of the most interesting parts of 21333 to build because of the different scales used within the same space.

The set is literally built in every direction, and most of the layers are mini builds that attach once completed. This makes sense as it means they can be built flat rather than having to be

awkwardly added at a vertical angle. There are a lot of delicate parts that need to be pushed on firmly and that can be fiddly. Press down too hard in the wrong area and some pieces will easily come off. This issue only really becomes alleviated once the frame is added later on in the build.

Before the frame the painting needs its actual starry sky. This part of the build will likely split fans – some will either love how relaxing the layering is, others will absolutely hate the repetition. Either way, the SNOT technique mimics *Starry Night* well, even if it requires hundreds of 1x2 and 1x4 plates.

Any LEGO fan who has built a big stack of plates knows that they will bend, so how does 21333 get away with it? The whole sky is stabilised around the back using 1x8 and 1x10 pieces that lock everything into place. At that point the stars can be dotted across the sky. The detail printed on these elements is astounding. They manage to perfectly balance looking like Van Gogh and LEGO design at the same time. Having a mix of sizes and including some transparent elements make the model more visually interesting.

An addition to 21333 that wasn't in the original submission is the frame, and it's quite easy to see why it was added. It finishes the painting in a beautiful way, but it makes the whole model much stronger too. The set is really heavy and the frame makes it strong enough to safely hang on a wall. Whereas the

The master at work.





## VERDICT

A completely unique LEGO build, 21333 is packed with fascinating techniques that will challenge fans as they construct their own piece of brick art.

**88/100**

The swirls are hypnotising.



frames on the LEGO Art models are simple rectangles, this one has a concave design that's far more stylish. New 1x4 and corner bread-loaf tiles (that's really what the LEGO designers call them) in black provide a super smooth finish and look incredibly similar to how the real painting is currently exhibited in New York.

Once the frame is all in place then the final part of the build is the cypress tree. In the original painting this is the flattest part of the painting, being much less textured than the rest. Here it is inverted and the cypress stands out, pushed forward by a Technic pin holding the tree in place. It's a fascinating way to finish the build, as wavy strips of dark green and dark brown curve into each other so organically it's hard to tell that bricks were even used except for an exposed stud here or there.

That can be said for the whole finished model though, with 21333 Starry Night toeing the line between LEGO build and art. It celebrates the level of detail and realism that can be achieved. 21333 is entirely a display piece, and while it may come with a fantastic Van Gogh minifigure, this set is one to be looked at and admired from afar. There are no faults to this model except when it comes to physically displaying it. Due to the three-dimensional aspect of the set, it sticks out quite a distance from the wall, so ideally it needs to be above something or on a decently wide shelf to protect its pieces, so that its stars can shine without being bumped into. ■

Tiny town.





**Price:** £44.99, \$54.99, €49.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 476

# 76217 I AM GROOT

Can this LEGO figure capture the charm of Groot in his most adorable life stage?

**Words & Pics:** Kat Rees-Jauke

**LONG BEFORE BABY** Yoda broke the internet, Marvel figured out how to merchandise adorable characters. By having Groot sacrifice himself for the Guardians of the Galaxy, he could return as a much cuter, naughtier baby. This cheeky version of the Flora Colossi was an instant hit in the sequel, adding even more comedy to an already outrageously funny group of characters. But 76217 isn't all joking around, with some sophisticated building techniques resulting in a marvellous figure.

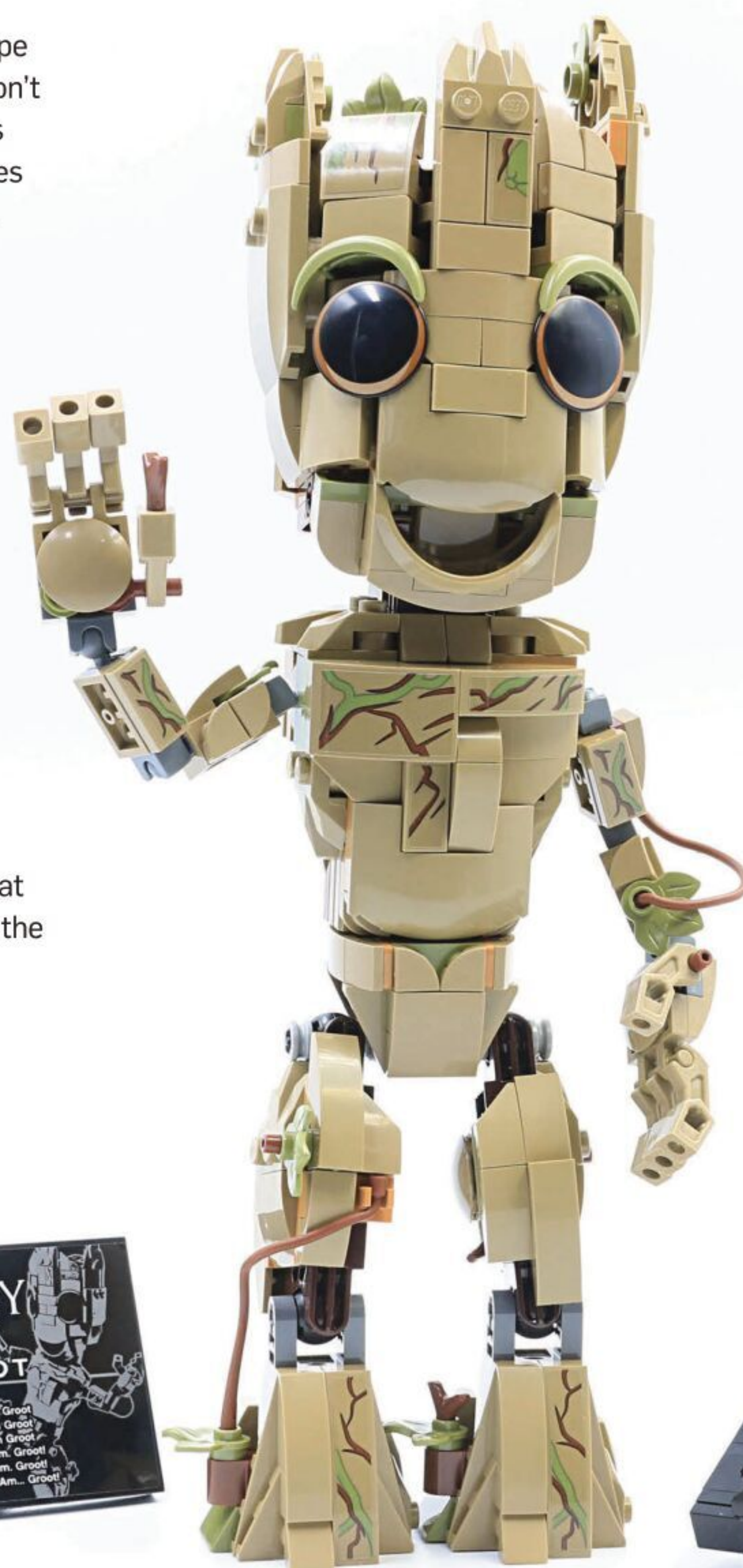
It's practically a requirement when building this to put on the Guardians of the Galaxy soundtrack, although the film is an acceptable alternative. 76217 may only clock in at 476 pieces, it is a fiddly build that's going to take quite a bit of time, so some retro tunes will definitely help. Plus Star Lord's iconic mixtape gets its own brick version in this set – just don't clog up a cassette player with bricks. It adds a lovely bit of nostalgia to the model and uses SNOT techniques to great effect, so it looks incredibly realistic. Transparent plates and window elements recreate the plastic reels inside, while stickers are welcome for once as the hand-written label. A simple flip of the 1x10 brick allows it to either be Vol. 1 or Vol. 2, and the design is authentic to the movie prop.

Considering Groot is basically a biological mech, surprisingly he relies on more System than Technic bricks. His torso is a combination of tan and olive plates, interspersed with rock elements for some bark texture, along with a selection of curved tiles. Frustratingly though, the majority of Groot's bark details come from stickers. What is extra annoying about these is figuring out the

correct rotation, so the pattern matches the instructions.

There is some really interesting parts usage to make up for all the stickers. LEGO whip elements become trailing vines that don't impede on Groot's posability. His torso is

**THERE IS SOME REALLY INTERESTING PARTS USAGE TO MAKE UP FOR ALL THE STICKERS**



'I am Groot.'

## VERDICT

Rocket would approve of this blocky version of his best friend. It's adorably fun, even if it's a little clunky in places.

**75/100**

made up of car bonnet plates, while Groot's mouth ingeniously uses a wheel-arch upside down. The only area that could have benefited from better design is with Groot's feet. For some reason these are built in exactly the same way, which means the leaf element on one sticks out into the other, restricting the movement of the legs and causing the leaf element to fly off sometimes. It's a strange choice by the designers and looks odd on display too.

As for the Technic pieces providing the posability, it mostly blends in, as much as it ever can on a LEGO figure. The hip joints are the biggest distraction, as the black Technic ball elements are pretty noticeable. The character's movability is a little restricted, but this matches his clunky movements in the films, so only adds to his charm.

Groot's expression is absolutely adorable and his head is the most complex section to build. It feels almost like making a BrickHeadz, just on a round 6x6 baseplate, as brightly coloured tiles are hidden inside to help achieve the perfect placement of all the bricks. These are then clad in separate mini builds for Groot's woody crown, and attached in extremely clever ways beyond stud connections.

A particular stand out feature are Groot's eyes. One complaint about 21303 Wall-E was how flat the robot's eyes were, with the 2x2 tiles not having any printing. The LEGO shield elements used in 76217 have a slim brown ring around the edge, implying a pupil design, and it truly brings little Groot to life. Combine this with his olive green eyebrows, and his smiling expression is absolutely heart melting.

Like all the other characters in this upscaled LEGO style, 76217 comes with a display plaque. However, it is pretty unique. Every answer is 'I



Feel like dancing?



am Groot' just with some variation in grammar. It fits the character perfectly, keeping his origins from Planet X a mystery. One surprising part of this display plaque, apart from the unusual stats, is that no minifigure is included. Sets like 75318 The Child and 75187 BB-8 both came with minifigures alongside their much bigger brick-built version, and it feels like a missed opportunity not to have included Groot in either his adult or baby minifigure form.

If fans love Guardians of the Galaxy and dancing Footloose style, then 76217 I Am Groot is one to beat the Collector to. It's an enjoyable build and a very fun model that fans of all ages will enjoy playing with. It captures baby Groot's (mostly) innocent charm, not to mention it's the perfect way to prepare for the upcoming holiday special. We are Groot! ■

Play it again, Groot.



**Price:** £3.49 / \$4.99 / €3.99 / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** Varies

# 71033 THE MUPPETS

It's hard to think of a colourful group of characters better suited to a Collectible Minifigures series

**Words & Pics:** Graham Hancock

**Name:** Kermit the Frog

**Verdict:** Simplicity is key with Kermit, which the designers have understood with clear, clean torso printing. His head element is absolutely perfect for the character. A lovely banjo element with shiny printing is included along with half a rainbow.

**Best element:** Banjo

**What to feel for:** Head, banjo



**Name:** Miss Piggy

**Verdict:** The intricacy of the shaping of Miss Piggy's head is incredible, capturing her likeness so well that the diva herself would approve. Decoration on the arms and sides of the legs completes her outfit perfectly.

**Best element:** Magazine cover

**What to feel for:** Head, 2x3 tile

**Name:** Fozzie Bear

**Verdict:** This might be getting as repetitive as Fozzie's gags, but the head shaping on this minifigure is exceptional. The tiny eyes and nose, the fur on the head, the eyebrows beneath the hat... this looks like a miniaturised Fozzie.

**Best element:** Head

**What to feel for:** Head, banana



**Name:** Rowlf the Dog

**Verdict:** As well as incredibly detailed head, Rowlf features some wonderfully subtle printing that's easy to miss at first glance, but it conveys his shaggy fur. A little buildable Beethoven bust from a classic sketch is included along with sheet music.

**Best element:** Sonata No.6

**What to feel for:** Head, music sheet, bust's hair



**Name:** Gonzo

**Verdict:** All of the Muppets have oddly shaped heads, but Gonzo has the most distinct shape by far. The designers have captured his elongated nose and big eyes, along with his vibrant outfits.

**Best element:** Camilla the Chicken

**What to feel for:** Head, Camilla



## VERDICT

The printing and element choice are both excellent in this series, but it's the beautiful new heads that are the standout aspect.

**90/100**



**Name:** The Swedish Chef

**Verdict:** While a few more vegetables would have been welcome, it is impossible to be disappointed by a minifigure that captures the character so well, with the detailed head-and-hat piece looking as if it came straight from The Muppet Show set.

**Best element:** Tomato

**What to feel for:** Head, whisk



**Name:** Animal

**Verdict:** All of these minifigures capture the personalities of the characters that they are based on, with Animal perhaps the best example. The enthusiasm that comes through his eyes, which are part of a beautifully sculpted and intricately decorated head, is perfect for the character. The buildable drums are a great accessory.

**Best element:** Drum decoration

**What to feel for:** Head, drum elements



**Name:** Janice

**Verdict:** Just as groovy as you'd hope, Janice's head captures her big lips and eyelashes as well as her distinctive blonde hair. The outfit she's wearing conveys the quintessential California beach vibe that the character is so known for.

**Best element:** Guitar

**What to feel for:** Head, guitar

**Name:** Dr Bunsen Honeydew

**Verdict:** What makes The Muppets such a great choice for a Collectible Minifigures series is the variety in the character design. Honeydew's round head is delivered perfectly down to his black-rimmed glasses.

**Best element:** Beaker

**What to feel for:** Head, beaker



**Name:** Beaker

**Verdict:** Honeydew wouldn't be complete without Beaker, whose dual moulded head is incredible. His expression conveys the character exactly as you'd like him to be, to the point you can practically hear him squeaking. The colour of his outfit further elevates this minifigure.

**Best element:** Controller

**What to feel for:** Head, walkie talkie

**Name:** Statler

**Verdict:** Statler's chin is something to behold on this minifigure – it's outstanding, in more ways than one. The nose is another great example of the kind of detail element designers can now deliver. While a laptop feels too modern for him, it's nice to have Scooter sneaking his way into this wave.

**Best element:** Laptop screen

**What to feel for:** Head, laptop elements



**Name:** Waldorf

**Verdict:** While Waldorf would no doubt have some critiques for the designers behind this series, he's another example of why it's brilliant. The minifigure has an intricately shaped head and an apt outfit, with a great accessory in the 'snore card'.

**Best element:** Snore card

**What to feel for:** Head, 2x2 tile





**Price:** £54.99 / \$59.99 / €59.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 584

# 75328 THE MANDALORIAN HELMET

The helmet that never comes off arrives in the LEGO Star Wars collection

**Words & Pics:** Graham Hancock

**DIN DJARIN IS** part of a Mandalorian sect that never remove their helmets in front of others – it proved a clever conceit for the first ever Star Wars streaming series, as it meant that the show immediately had a Star Wars feel. As the LEGO Group's run of helmet sets has demonstrated, there are a lot of character in the galaxy far, far away who wear buckets.

Now that fans have followed the bounty hunter's exploits for two seasons, the helmet Din wears is a familiar image, making it perfect for inclusion in this series of display sets. As is the case with all of these models, the build begins with building an interior structure surrounded by SNOT elements so that the visible sections can be attached.

While often this is predominantly delivered by classic brackets and SNOT bricks, a few areas need something a little less orthodox – the shield with studs from Collectible Minifigures and Mixels joints are two ways that

Never remove the helmet.

## 75328 MIXES VISIBLE STUDS WITH SMOOTH TILES AND SLOPES

the designers deliver the trickier angles. It's necessary, as Mando's helmet has some sharp angles at the front.

As with other LEGO Star Wars helmets, 75328 mixes visible studs with smooth tiles and slopes. This is to convey the hard lines that are visible on the actual helmet, which has a few ridges. It's a good way of capturing this aspect of the prop while also giving it a distinctly LEGO feel. To further distinguish between sections of the helmet, shiny silver elements accentuate some of the lines, working well alongside the grey.

The overall shaping is excellent, capturing what is now a very familiar bucket. The 'cheeks' on the helmet recess slightly, the top of the T visor slopes down and the side sections jut out slightly – all of these aspects are replicated on the model. The only place that's a little disappointing is the central black section, which should slope inwards, but instead just runs straight down the front of the build. This inaccuracy will annoy some, but at least it's consistent with 75277 Boba Fett Helmet.

Minor quibble aside, this is worth trading some Beskar for and adding to your collection thanks to it being an attractive display piece that includes a few clever design flourishes. This is the way. ■

## VERDICT

There are a lot of nice LEGO Star Wars helmets, but this is the one you want next to the television ready for Mando's next appearance.

**77/100**





**Price:** £54.99 / \$59.99 / €59.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 675

# 75327 LUKE SKYWALKER (RED FIVE) HELMET

The light side gets some representation with a colourful addition to the helmet series

**Words & Pics:** Graham Hancock

**IT'S CLICHÉ TO** use the word 'iconic' in relation to anything from Star Wars, partially thanks to the movies delivering more iconic costumes, vehicles and locations than the rest of the film industry manages in a decade. While Darth Vader, Stormtrooper and Boba Fett are perhaps the names that first spring to mind when it comes to the iconic helmets of the saga, as soon as you see Luke's pilot helmet it takes your mind to the galaxy far, far away.

Building this set is very different to the full helmets that the bad guys have had previously, as the central column of the display stand runs all the way to the top of Luke's headgear. The SNOT section that forms the centre of the helmet is higher than on the other sets, with some of it running down the back of the column, jutting out at different lengths so the curve can be achieved.

When the various side panels and top sections are added, all of the poppy red and yellow accents combine with the white to deliver a

## THE POPPY RED AND YELLOW ACCENTS COMBINE WITH THE WHITE TO DELIVER A COLOURFUL MODEL

colourful model. There are even bits of interior to complete the prop replica, including grey elements representing padding. The white lines that run down the back of the helmet are printed, as are the two large Rebel Alliance symbol elements. Identical side discs are also printed, but the elements that combine with

them are stickered. It's more printed parts than is typical for a helmet set, that's for sure.

The central section that juts out looks great, the sides of the helmet are accurate and the visor is very cleverly represented with transparent orange elements. The visor sits quite high though thanks to the forehead section of the helmet seemingly being raised too much, looking a little off and putting the Alliance symbols in the wrong place. Another weaker aspect of the design is in the chin strap, which seems a little too big in comparison to the rest of the helmet.

Fundamentally though, you're going to put this set on a shelf and see Luke's X-wing helmet – it's not 100% accurate to the screen design, but it has all of the key features and is close enough that most Star Wars fans will be very happy to display it. ■

## VERDICT

The open nature of Luke's helmet presents different design challenges to the enclosed helmets seen before, and this model resolves them elegantly.

# 70/100



'Red Five, standing by.'



The set includes several printed parts.



**Price:** £89.99 / \$99.99 / €99.99 / **Minifigures:** 7 / **Pieces:** 732

# 75326 BOBA FETT'S THRONE ROOM

Evict Bib Fortuna and put Boba Fett on the throne that once belonged to Jabba the Hutt

**Words & Pics:** Graham Hancock

## VERDICT

This important location from *The Book of Boba Fett* makes for a great display set.

**69/100**

**THE EPILOGUE TO** *Star Wars: The Mandalorian* Season 2 really caught the attention of viewers. Boba Fett and Fennec Shand entered Jabba's palace to find Bib Fortuna on the throne – Boba murdered the Twi'lek in cold blood before hauling his body off the throne. That brutal tone did not continue in *The Book of Boba Fett*, but the location continued to be an important one in the series, as Boba and Fennec figured out their plot to help the town of Mos Espa.

Building this set is a joy – it's really pacey to put together, with some intricate little sections interspersed with the layering and building. It's rewarding to see the room growing at pace, with the throne itself coming last; the designers left it to be a treat at the end.

What's neat for those who have been building LEGO sets for a few decades is that this is reminiscent of the 1990s Castle models. There is a hinge at the back of the throne room that serves no purpose other than to make the back area easy to access. The two side sections – the table and the doorway – can hinge in to make the throne room more intimate or be pushed

back and clipped in place to open things out in a way that works well for display.

Another nice display feature is that the throne slides out of the centre, so if you'd just like to display the infamous bounty hunter sat on his seat of power, that's an option. Pulling out the massive chair also reveals a hidden compartment where weapons are stored.

## MAKING THE THRONE THE DOMINANT FOCAL POINT IS A SOLID AESTHETIC CHOICE

The throne itself is absolutely enormous compared to a minifigure, certainly not to scale with how it appears on screen. Given that the defining image from the scene is the throne though, this feels like an acceptable compromise; making the throne the dominant focal point is a solid aesthetic choice and allows for a play feature to be built in.

A little grey button juts out on the left of the throne – flicking it with a little force will send the minifigure occupant falling out of the seat, allowing fans to recreate the moment when Boba Fett executes Bib Fortuna. The set's age marking is 9+, in case at this point you are curious.

Behind the throne is a spit roasting some chicken legs (or probably something more exotic) and a little kitchen area, with a pan and a bottle. This area looks fairly accurate to what was seen in the show, but the set is definitely giving a taste of the location as a playset rather than looking to replicate it precisely.

To the left of the main throne room is an alcove with a table and a couple of seats for the minifigure friends of Bib Fortuna to hang out. It's funny how with just a few parts an area can look instantly *Star Warsy*.

Over on the other side there's a section that double as the entrance to the throne room and the entrance to the palace. Memorably, there's a flight of stairs that Princess Leia sneaks down in *Return of the Jedi* and Fennec Shand walks

Bib won't be in charge for long.





down in the Mando epilogue, which these steps seem to be representing. A little play function allows a minifigure to be knocked over.

Most of the outside of the set is quite bland and doesn't particularly follow the shape of Jabba's palace. The entrance section though has a mini version of the doorway, with the gatekeeper droid peeking out of the centre. That door can be raised and lowered, with the gatekeeper droid locking the raised door in place. When the door isn't raised, Boba and Fennec can stand on the balcony above, overlooking the desert as they do in the series.

It's a set with a solid minifigure line-up. The most recent version of Boba Fett is included, as is Fennec Shand – but this time around she has a hair piece. It's great to see her get it, but it's poor form that every set she appears in doesn't include it.

Rather than fix what isn't broken, the LEGO design team has returned to the most recent version of the Gamorrean Guard, last seen in 2013. The colours have been adjusted slightly, but the head and body element is pretty much identical to how it looked before. The legs have been altered to match the design from *The Book of Boba Fett*.

A minifigure that's all new is Weequay Guard, with a detailed print that even features the character's braids on the back of the head, running down onto the back of the torso. Theelin Dancer is a really fun minifigure, her white outfit and pink stand out from the other denizens in the set.

The Quarren features an excellent new head that hopefully means more of this species will crop up in future sets. Subtle printing really accentuates the delicate sculpting it must have

taken to get this character looking just right.

Bib Fortuna is the most interesting minifigure in a solid selection, with a new lekku element that is larger than last time the character was released – that makes sense, as the character has become physically larger since Jabba's death. A double-sided head features creepy sharp teeth and red eyes, while the torso and legs convey the character's costume faithfully.

The image of Boba Fett on the throne is one of the most vivid from the current era of Star Wars, making this set very tempting indeed. So much detail is packed into the model that it works well for display – largely thanks to that throne being the focal point. Whether there's enough play value for the price is questionable, but for most adult fans, the extent of the play will be arranging and rearranging the minifigures. ■



The palace entrance and balcony.

The door can be raised.



**Price:** £124.99, \$129.99, €139.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 1,476

# 21058 GREAT PYRAMID OF GIZA

Visit the 26th century BC as Architecture recreates Egypt's most iconic historic structure

**Words & Pics:** Kat Rees-Jauke

## VERDICT

LEGO Architecture does something completely fresh as the theme steps back in time to Ancient Egypt.

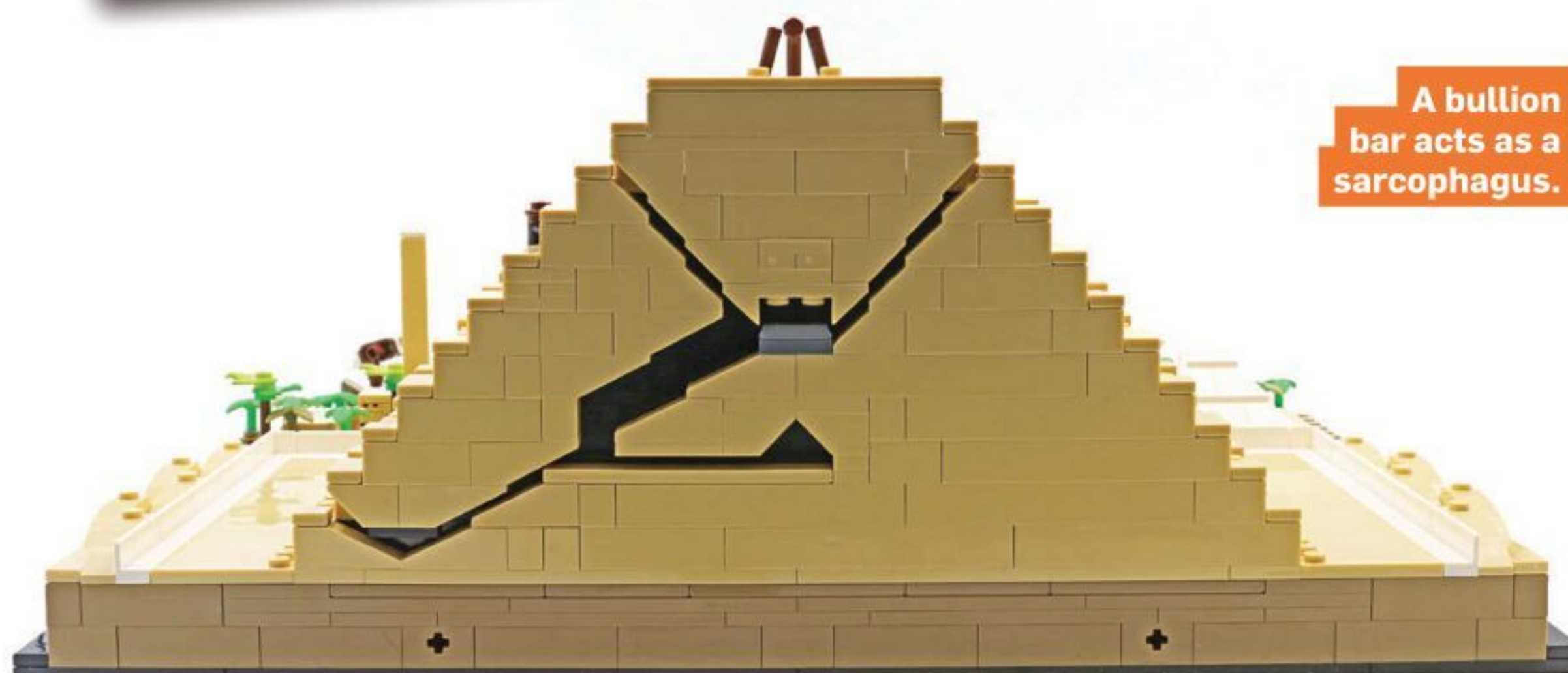
## 86/100



Hieroglyphs spell out Khufu's Horizon.



Sphinx alley.



A bullion bar acts as a sarcophagus.





**ANCIENT EGYPT HAS** dazzled explorers and archaeologists for well over a century, with its intriguing hieroglyphs and hidden tombs. It has gone on to inspire everything from modern architecture through music to comic book heroes, so it's fair to say that the sands of Egypt have never gone out of fashion. Standing for over four thousand years, the Great Pyramid of Giza is one of the most recognisable landmarks in the world and the perfect way for Egypt to debut in the LEGO Architecture theme. However, this pyramid looks a little different to the one people will recognise, so what's going on?

While most LEGO Architecture sets depict landmarks in their current form, 21058 has gone back in time to capture the Great Pyramid of Giza as it would have looked when originally finished. Rather than the wind blasted façade

that stands now, the white limestone and gold would have gleamed in the sun. Over time the limestone was taken for other projects and the

## ■ ■ LIGHT TAN BRICKS ARE INTERSPERSED WITH BLACK ONES TO CREATE THE ILLUSION OF SHADOWS ■ ■

golden capstone was likely melted down. It is a very interesting choice by the designers and this historical perspective works extremely well.

Built onto a massive base of 40x44 studs, at first it looks like nothing other than a confusing

square. Inside are layers of multicoloured bricks that just don't make sense at all. Dark green is mixed with blue and turquoise, not very much like sand. This colour coding eventually becomes the Nile. Again, the designers have turned back the clock, because as recently as the 19th century the river ran so close that the pyramids were reflected in its waters. The different blues and greens add depth to the water, which is finished with 1x4 trans-blue tiles. Once this area is complete, it's time to build the grounds.

This build is a little cat-and-mouse because every time the next bag looks like it could be the pyramid, it's not. Builders will have to be patient to hit the halfway mark for that. Little sand dunes surround the base and are made from arch bricks topped with curved tiles, which look effective and to scale. Similarly, the sphinxes

What's making you think of Toblerone?



The Great Pyramid receives more than 14 million visitors a year.





No-one knows exactly how the pyramid was built.



The green offsets the sand nicely.





Obelisks are icons of Ancient Egypt.



leading up to the tomb ingeniously use only nine pieces, making great use of 1x2 roof elements for the heads.

At the pyramid entrance LEGO candles act as brilliant columns and there's plenty more surprising parts usage to be found. One frustrating part of all this environment is that it is incredibly fiddly. Everything has to be placed perfectly, emphasised by the palm trees dotting the landscape. Over 40 of these need to be placed into 1x1 studs with holes, aligned correctly, and some placed before others to get the canopy effect.

After all this tediousness the pyramid finally begins to take shape. It is built in two stages, separate from the main build. First is the interior layer, which could have been a very repetitive section of brick layering, yet it is not. Light tan bricks are interspersed with black ones to create the illusion of shadows, specifically the tomb chambers. The long corridors stretching to the top of the pyramid were intended for the pharaoh's ba, or soul, to use to reach the afterlife. The offsetting and angles required to achieve this are absolutely fascinating, not to mention pretty accurate to the real pyramid.

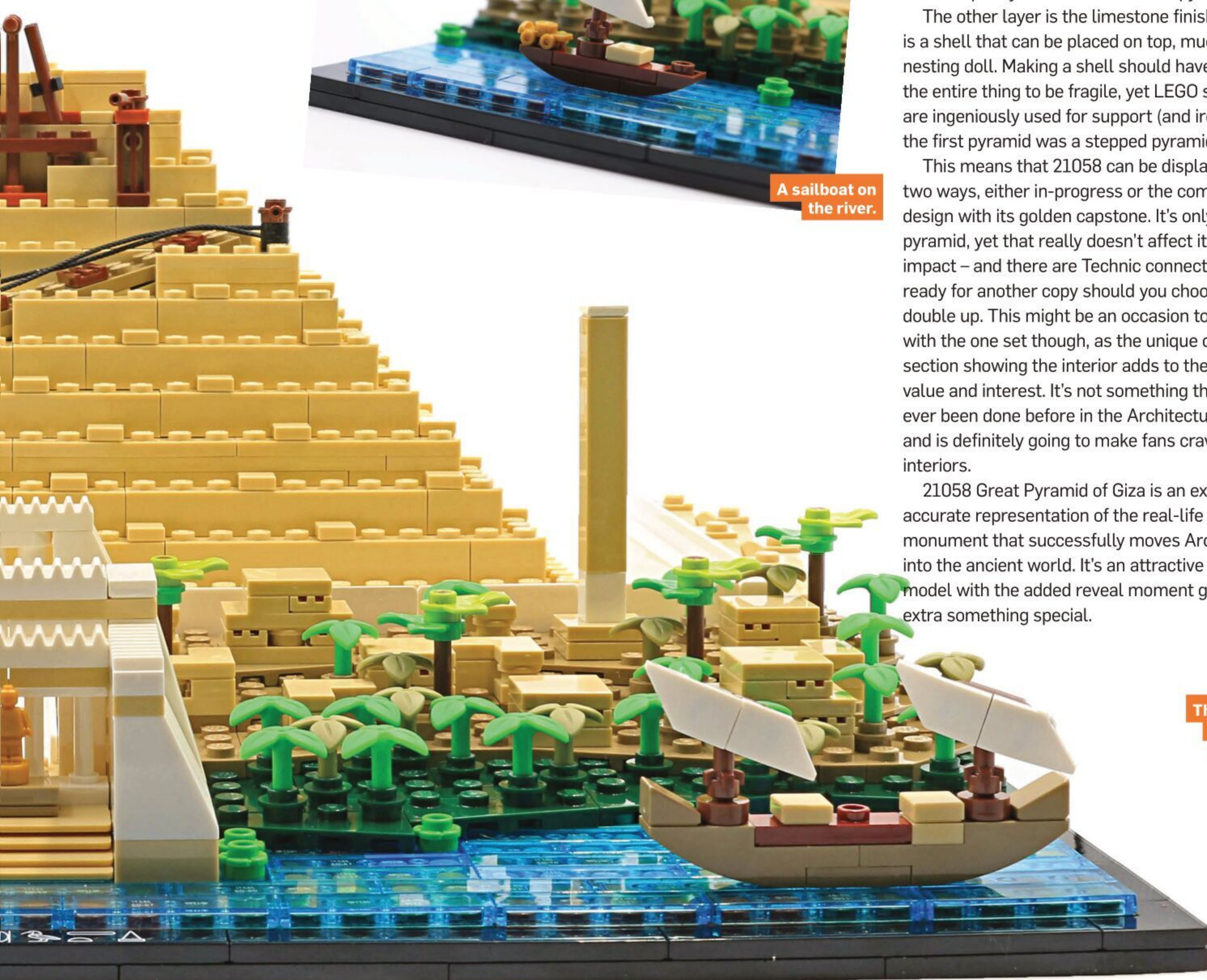
The other layer is the limestone finish and this is a shell that can be placed on top, much like a nesting doll. Making a shell should have caused the entire thing to be fragile, yet LEGO staircases are ingeniously used for support (and ironically the first pyramid was a stepped pyramid).

This means that 21058 can be displayed in two ways, either in-progress or the completed design with its golden capstone. It's only half a pyramid, yet that really doesn't affect its display impact – and there are Technic connections ready for another copy should you choose to double up. This might be an occasion to stick with the one set though, as the unique cross-section showing the interior adds to the display value and interest. It's not something that's ever been done before in the Architecture range and is definitely going to make fans crave more interiors.

21058 Great Pyramid of Giza is an excellent, accurate representation of the real-life monument that successfully moves Architecture into the ancient world. It's an attractive display model with the added reveal moment giving it an extra something special.



A sailboat on the river.



The work in progress version.



**Price:** £44.99 / \$49.99 / €49.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 1,100

# 11021 90 YEARS OF PLAY

This classic brick box gets a 90th anniversary twist

**Words & Pics:** Graham Hancock

## VERDICT

A decent selection of parts for free building are included along with a number of nostalgic mini builds.

# 70/100

**WHEN THE LEGO** Group has an anniversary, it's common for the company to release a traditional 'box of bricks' building set. Typically, these are just classic boxes of bricks, perhaps with some inspiration for models, but not instructions. Expectations for this set were very much along those lines – while the box does feature models inspired by classic LEGO toys from the company's history, it was easy to assume they were just suggestions.

Expectations are therefore upended when two instruction books fall out of the box. Six of the bags are numbered – and those bags contain the elements needed to follow the steps to build the series of micro models. Another five bags contain an eclectic selection of colourful bricks for free building.

In a set like this though, the part choice is only so eclectic. Almost every piece included has a clear connection point so that the uninitiated will be able to get to grips with what's in the box. That means that the models built with the instructions have a lot of limitations on them, so they are not all the most polished constructions out there – many of them are quite blocky.

Given that this set celebrates a company that has a 2x4 brick at its heart though, that's no bad thing. While beautiful 18+ models that can be mistaken for not being built from LEGO elements look great on display, they don't necessarily communicate the LEGO System in

## IT'S ABOUT BUILDING THROUGH THE LEGO PORTFOLIO'S HISTORY, ENGAGING WITH IT IN A TACTILE WAY

the same way as a duck that has a bill made from a 2x6 plate.

It's that duck that the building begins with, appropriately. In total, there are 15 models inspired by sets from LEGO history – and they are built in the order that the original sets were released. This means that rather than just being a basic brick box with '90' slapped on the packaging, this set really is taking you through the company's back catalogue. If anyone wants

to introduce their child to wonderful LEGO sets from years past without boring them, this would be a great way to do it – you could build through the set while explaining the significance of the different models.

The duck is fine, but the red and white house is better – those buildings from the Town Plan era were white with blocky red roofs, so this really does capture the spirit of those original sets. Similarly, 1966's 113 Motorised Train Set had quite a basic shape, which is replicated well.

Some of the reimaginings work really well because the originals were so blocky, lending themselves to a basic parts palette – 375 Castle, 7237 Police Station, 41340 Friendship House and 41906 Pineapple Pencil Holder all look like tiny versions of those original sets.

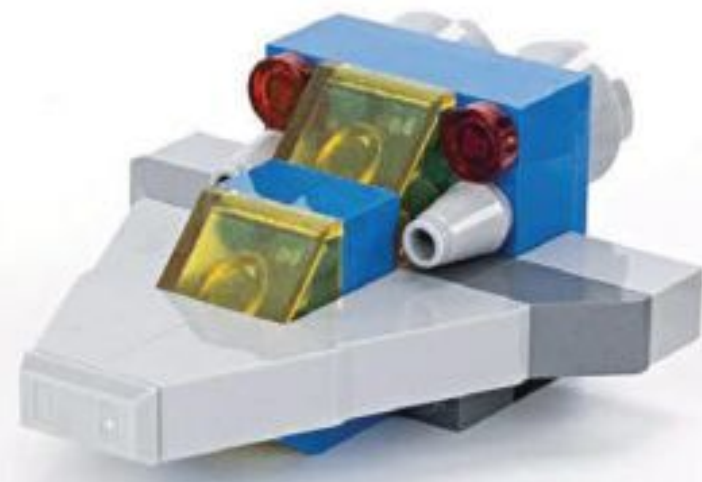
5978 Sphinx Secret Surprise has a different composition to the original model but captures its rough layout and essence with some humour, making this is a fun nod to Adventurers. Another classic theme getting some love in an inventive way is Fabuland, with the mini version of 3601 Elton Elephant making the idea of a series of brick-built anthropomorphic animal characters

Some nice parts in some nice colours.





'member Castle and Space?



very appealing.

Those builds that work less well are when more complex shapes have been simplified – both 6285 Black Seas Barracuda and 8043 Motorized Excavator are identifiable, but they are a bit too square for the subject matter. 70503 The Golden Dragon sort of works, and there's an admirable attempt to deliver Belville 5827 Royal Coach – in a nice touch, a frog rather than royalty is sitting in the carriage.

BIONICLE fans are famously exacting in their knowledge of the lore and desire for the LEGO Group to acknowledge their favourite theme – this bizarre rendition of 8534 Tahu is unlikely to please them any more than Castle winning the 90th anniversary fan vote, with the comical figure bearing little resemblance to the fiery hero.

497 Galaxy Explorer (or 928 Space Cruiser and Moonbase if you prefer) is the highlight among the models – it's built studs facing forward, which results in a smooth finish that makes it look even more elegant than the original model. Although this set is for children aged five and up, which is why the parts and techniques included are so simple, this build shows children another option than going for studs facing upwards.

Hopefully this makes clear that it's a mixed bag of models, but as implied before, it's not really about having an amazing set of display models here – it's about building through the LEGO portfolio's history, engaging with it in a tactile way. When you admire the builds after putting them all together, you'll see how things have changed and evolved over the years and no doubt be reminded of one or two personal favourite themes.

Because this set is capturing '90 years of play' though, that's just the beginning. The decent parts selection that remains now allows you to get creative and build something new, perhaps inspired by these models, perhaps not. It is fitting that this set offers the instructions fans know and love, but then encourages the creativity inherent in the LEGO System – never has a set been more aptly named or seemed more appropriate as an anniversary release. Other anniversary sets may be more impressive and detailed, but they won't deliver the full 90 years in a box as well as 11021 does. ■

Pirates, Adventurers and Belville.



A chunky NINJAGO dragon.



Technic, DOTS and Friends.



It's the duck again.





**Price:** £44.99, \$49.99, €49.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 771

# 10309 SUCCULENTS

Is 10309 a beautiful blossom or more of a prickly pear?

**Words & Pics:** Kat Rees-Jauke

## VERDICT

A combination of vibrant colours and brilliant techniques make 10309 fascinating for LEGO newbies or seasoned builders.

**80/100**

**WHETHER IT'S A** Venus flytrap on a kitchen windowsill or a cactus brightening an office desk, succulents are some of the most popular plants around. Requiring minimal care, they are great for plant newbies as well as horticultural heroes. If you don't have a green thumb then 10309 Succulents might be the answer to your plant needs, building a set of succulents so realistic they will make anyone look twice.

This is an impressive set to put together as each succulent build shows off a new technique. They may all belong to the same family, yet there is no repetition to be found within this build.

While green predominates across the model, there are some lovely splashes of colour including the orange echeveria (expect to be a Latin expert after reading the instructions). It uses angled dark yellow pieces more commonly

used on LEGO cars for its tight rosette of a flower. This use of unusual parts continues throughout the rest of the succulents.

Construction may not be a favourite among LEGO traditionalists, but its parts certainly continue to be useful. The shoulder pads are

## EACH SUCCULENT BUILD SHOWS OFF A NEW TECHNIQUE

back and in lilac for the lavender echeveria petals, alternately arranged via Technic pins. What is really impressive throughout the build is just how natural everything looks, like the aloe leaves pointing in random directions, and most of the Technic pieces and studs are completely

hidden.

The cactus is instantly recognisable and it embodies desert colours by using 2x4 roof bricks in olive green for the first time. Studs with holes then act as anchors for tiny tan stem pieces. This LEGO one gets bonus points for not being prickly.

As for the model's most ingenious parts usage, that title goes to the burro's tail. It uses a whopping 34 egg elements arranged along a sturdy column of headlamp bricks to achieve its unique texture.

Any fan who loves plants will take something away from 10309. With each succulent built onto a 6x6 base, the set provides a great starting point for adding in some homemade creations. Even if you don't go that far, the model provides realistic looking succulents that won't need watering. ■

You'll do a double take.

You can rearrange the display.





**Price:** £44.99, \$49.99, €49.99 / **Minifigures:** 0 / **Pieces:** 608

# 10311 ORCHID

Roses are red, violets are blue, is this pink orchid one to love too?

**Words & Pics:** Kat Rees-Jauke

## VERDICT

This is a build to race through so that the repetition fades off, because the finished model is truly pretty in pink.

**65/100**

LEGO frogs are everywhere.

Stranger Things have happened.

**ORCHIDS ARE ONE** of the oldest flowering plant species in the world, thought to date back over 300 million years. Throughout their very long history, they have been used as gifts to symbolise friendship in Chinese culture and as a token of love during Victorian times. Orchids are difficult to grow, taking at least half a decade to mature before flowering, so 10311 Orchid is not only a beautiful model but it's a time saving option too.

This set is continuing the recent trend in the Botanical Collection of having the flower in its own pot, which is a lot more convenient than 10280 Flower Bouquet. Built onto an 8x8 circular base, a fascinating Technic support lies inside that uses LEGO turntables to great effect to create the round structure needed. Once this is stabilised with 1x7 Technic beams, sand blue ridged tiles clip around in a very eye-catching geometric pattern. Sand blue was a great colour choice and it contrasts perfectly with the bright pink of the orchid flowers.

Technic also plays a huge part in the plant itself. Dark green Technic axles ensure that the stems are thin yet sturdy enough to eventually hold the flowers. Some of the angles look a little harsh, lacking the gently flowing curves of the original plant, though thankfully circular tiles and pink LEGO ice cream elements hide most of the grey Technic pins. The leaves also appear a bit too angular, the shell and cockpit elements not quite matching the rounded leaves that orchids are supposed to have. However, the use of dragon tail elements as air roots is inspired.

Another inspired element is used when 10311 takes a turn for the Upside Down because the smaller orchid flowers are the Demogorgon head in a new colour. They look absolutely brilliant and the printing of the pollinator guidelines is very detailed. For the main orchid flowers, shoulder pads are mixed with shield elements, frogs and even minifigure forks to achieve the intricate shapes of the sepals and lip. It's a very surprising piece of design, though the novelty unfortunately wears off because of the repetitive build process. It is finished off with loose bricks to represent compost, which seems counterintuitive considering all the Technic holding it together.

10311 Orchid really suffers from being repetitive during every stage of the build. It is one of those rare models that is more enjoyable once built, so you won't be in a rush to take it apart. ■

**SHOULDER PADS ARE MIXED WITH SHIELD ELEMENTS, FROGS AND EVEN MINIFIGURE FORKS**

Even a bee would be fooled.





# HALL OF FAME

The sets you need in your collection, according to Blocks reviewers

1

10294 Titanic

**i Theme:** For Adults / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 88



That Titanic has been executed at this size with such a solid and detailed set is remarkable.

**100/100**

2

21322 Pirates of Barracuda Bay

**i Theme:** Ideas / **Year:** 2020 / **Issue:** 67



Combines the nostalgia of classic Pirates with a sophisticated building experience, for a true LEGO masterpiece.

**100/100**

3

10265 Ford Mustang

**i Theme:** Creator Expert / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 55



Easily the coolest car to come out of the Creator Expert theme, the Ford Mustang fine-tunes LEGO vehicle design to perfection.

**100/100**

4

76139 1989 Batmobile

**i Theme:** DC Super Heroes / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 64



An incredible way to celebrate Batman's twin anniversaries in 2019, this is the greatest LEGO Batmobile.

**99/100**

5

76391 Hogwarts Icons – Collectors' Edition

**i Theme:** Wizarding World / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 83



These Harry Potter props are a delight to build, but really impress thanks to the final model's exceptional visual composition.

**99/100**

6

70620 NINJAGO City

**i Theme:** The LEGO NINJAGO Movie / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 36



There are few sets that can compare to NINJAGO City's size, scope and almost overwhelming level of detail and technique.

**98/100**

7

10257 Carousel

**i Theme:** Creator Expert / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 34



This welcome addition to LEGO fairgrounds is a work of art, and far more detailed than its much-revered predecessor.

**98/100**

8

21317 Steamboat Willie

**i Theme:** Ideas / **Year:** 2019 / **Issue:** 56



This monochromatic blast from Disney's past doesn't need any sprinkling of pixie dust, as it's pure magic from start to finish.

**98/100**

9

70904 Clayface Splat Attack

**i Theme:** The LEGO Batman Movie / **Year:** 2017 / **Issue:** 28



A creative and effective build that ensures a wide and valid appeal. Proof that great things come in small packages.

**98/100**

10

75313 AT-AT

**i Theme:** Star Wars / **Year:** 2021 / **Issue:** 87



The Ultimate Collector Series AT-AT justifies its incredible piece count and delivers a toy that lives up to what fans have dreamed of.

**97/100**





11

## 71741 NINJAGO City Gardens

i Theme: NINJAGO / Year: 2021 / Issue: 77



This beautiful and detailed model is a worthy follow-up to 70620 NINJAGO City, using its incredible piece count to excellent effect.

97/100

12

## 70618 Destiny's Bounty

i Theme: The LEGO NINJAGO Movie / Year: 2017 / Issue: 36



A highly detailed and exquisitely-designed vessel (with not a moulded hull in sight) for the full roster of ninja to enjoy.

97/100

13

## 75192 Millennium Falcon

i Theme: Star Wars / Year: 2017 / Issue: 40



A nearly perfect immortalisation of the fastest hunk of junk in the galaxy – as long as you can stomach the size and price.

96/100

14

## 10266 NASA Apollo 11 Lunar Lander

i Theme: Creator Expert / Year: 2019 / Issue: 58



A timely and worthy celebration of a historic event, the Lunar Lander is a stunning display piece and rewarding build.

96/100

15

## 80105 Chinese New Year Temple Fair

i Theme: Seasonal / Year: 2019 / Issue: 65



This is a beautifully-presented set with no cut corners, no lack of attention to detail, and absolutely no reason to not pick it up.

96/100

16

## 76052 Batman Classic TV Series – Batcave

i Theme: DC Super Heroes / Year: 2016 / Issue: 19



Offers an unrivalled Bat-experience, with plenty of Bat-love having gone into the Bat-design phase. Did we mention Bats?

96/100

17

## 70841 Benny's Space Squad

i Theme: The LEGO Movie 2 / Year: 2019 / Issue: 53



The question isn't whether you should buy this colourful celebration of Classic Space, but how many copies is enough.

96/100

18

## 71374 Nintendo Entertainment System

i Theme: Super Mario / Year: 2020 / Issue: 71



A level up for the LEGO Group, combining an expert build experience with showstopping functionality.

95/100

19

## 70916 The Batwing

i Theme: The LEGO Batman Movie / Year: 2017 / Issue: 39



A solid and mechanically interesting build, with an awesome Harley Quinn minifigure to sweeten the deal.

95/100

20

## 10274 Ghostbusters ECTO-1

i Theme: Ghostbusters / Year: 2020 / Issue: 75



A fantastic build experience that leads to a superb display set. I ain't afraid of no complex techniques.

95/100



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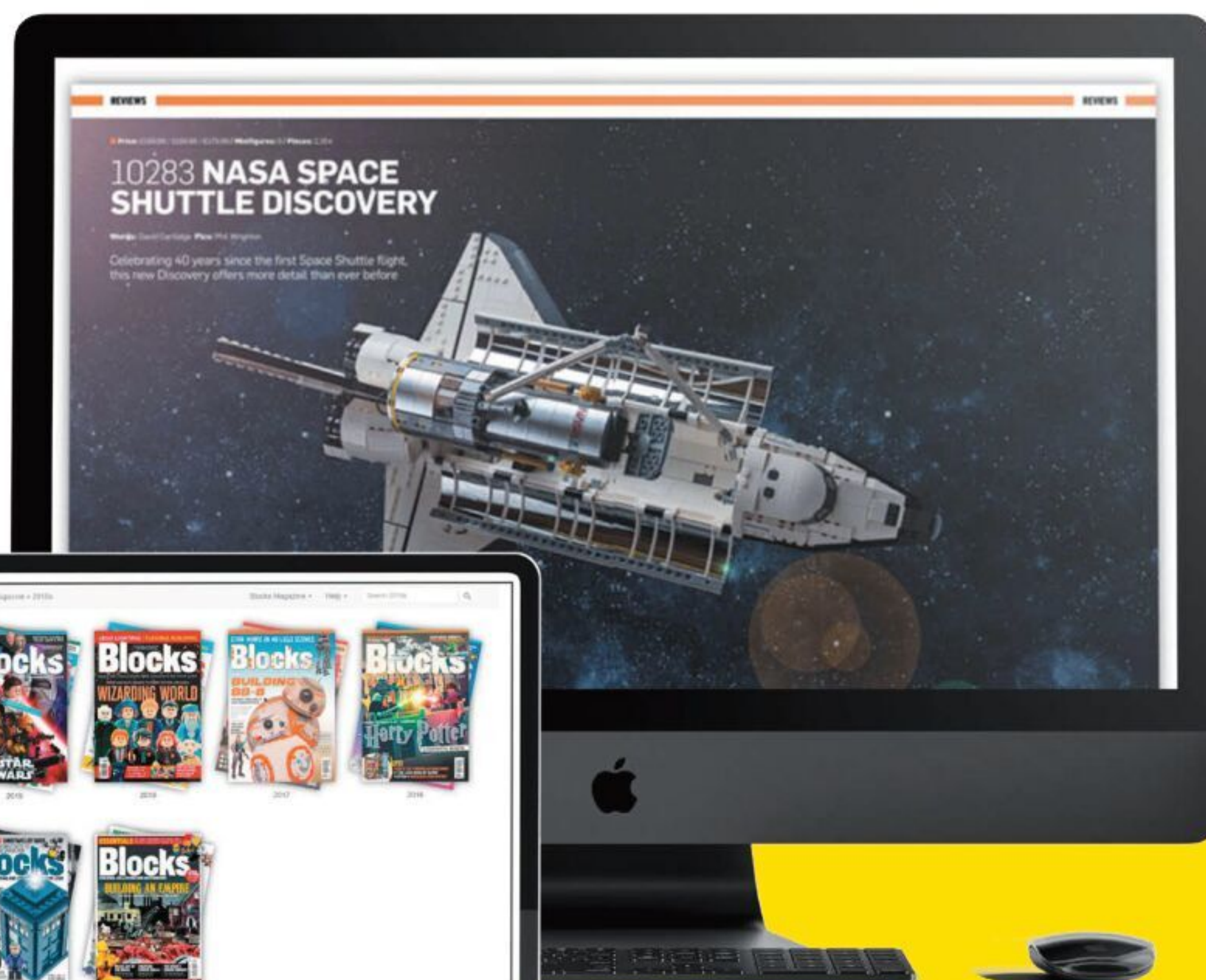
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# MOD SQUAD XL-15 CLASSIC SPACESHIP

A yellow canopy? There is only one thing to do with Buzz's new spaceship

**Words and Pics:** Daniel Konstanski



Buzz definitely gets an upgrade with this one.



**ANGUS MACLANE, DIRECTOR** of Lightyear, is a card-carrying AFOL. He even said that he cast the windscreen of the ship that 76832 XL-15 Spaceship is based on in transparent yellow because he's a fan of Classic Space. Everyone who loves that classic theme has been delighted by the new part, so at Blocks there was a clear project on the cards. Transforming Buzz Lightyear's sleek vessel into a Classic Space style model is nothing short of a joy.

Classic Space had a range of colour palettes during its run, but the iconic combination is light grey and blue for the fuselage with transparent yellow windscreens. Accordingly, much of this mod project involves swapping out most of the white for light grey and reverting to original

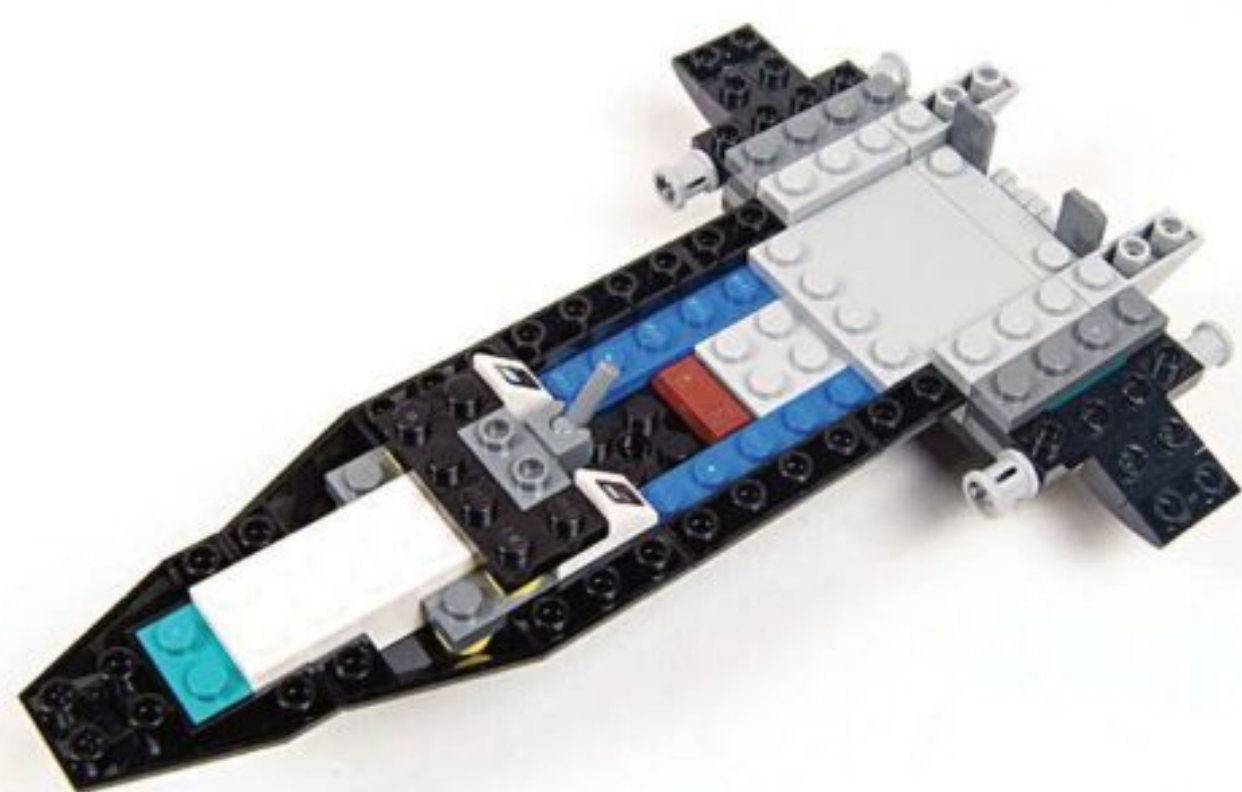
blue instead of the newer blue that adorns the XL-15. If you have a Classic Space minifigure, putting Buzz's head in that beloved old-school helmet is a fun touch.

### PREPARATION

As with most mod projects, the first step is stripping down the ship and then building back up the interior structure. Most of this first section is re-constructing the model as it appears in the instructions, just with different coloured bricks. The main deviation from this is that some of the wedge plates in the XL-15 have not yet been cast in old blue or light grey so a few substitutions have to be made.

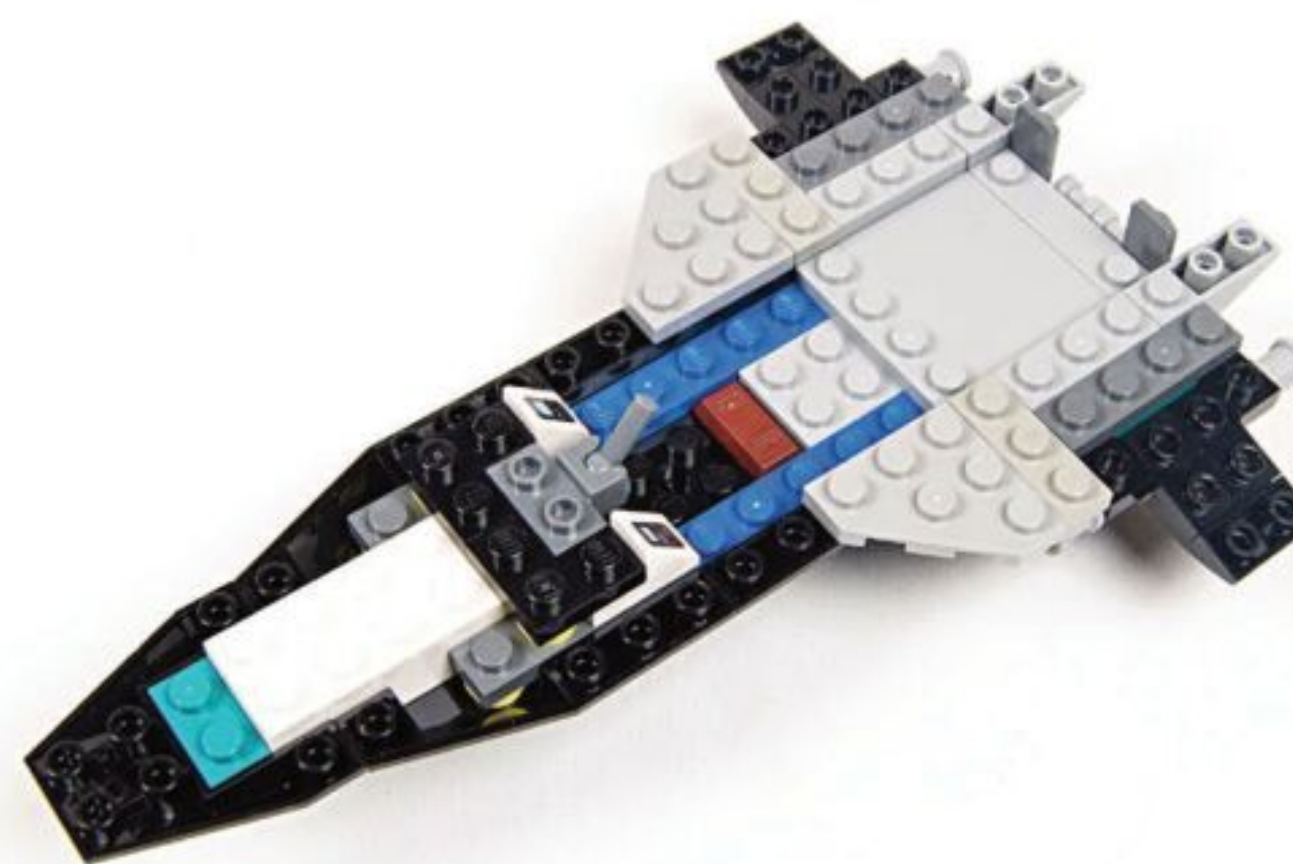
## ❏ EVERYONE WHO LOVES THAT CLASSIC THEME HAS BEEN DELIGHTED BY THE NEW PART ❏

1



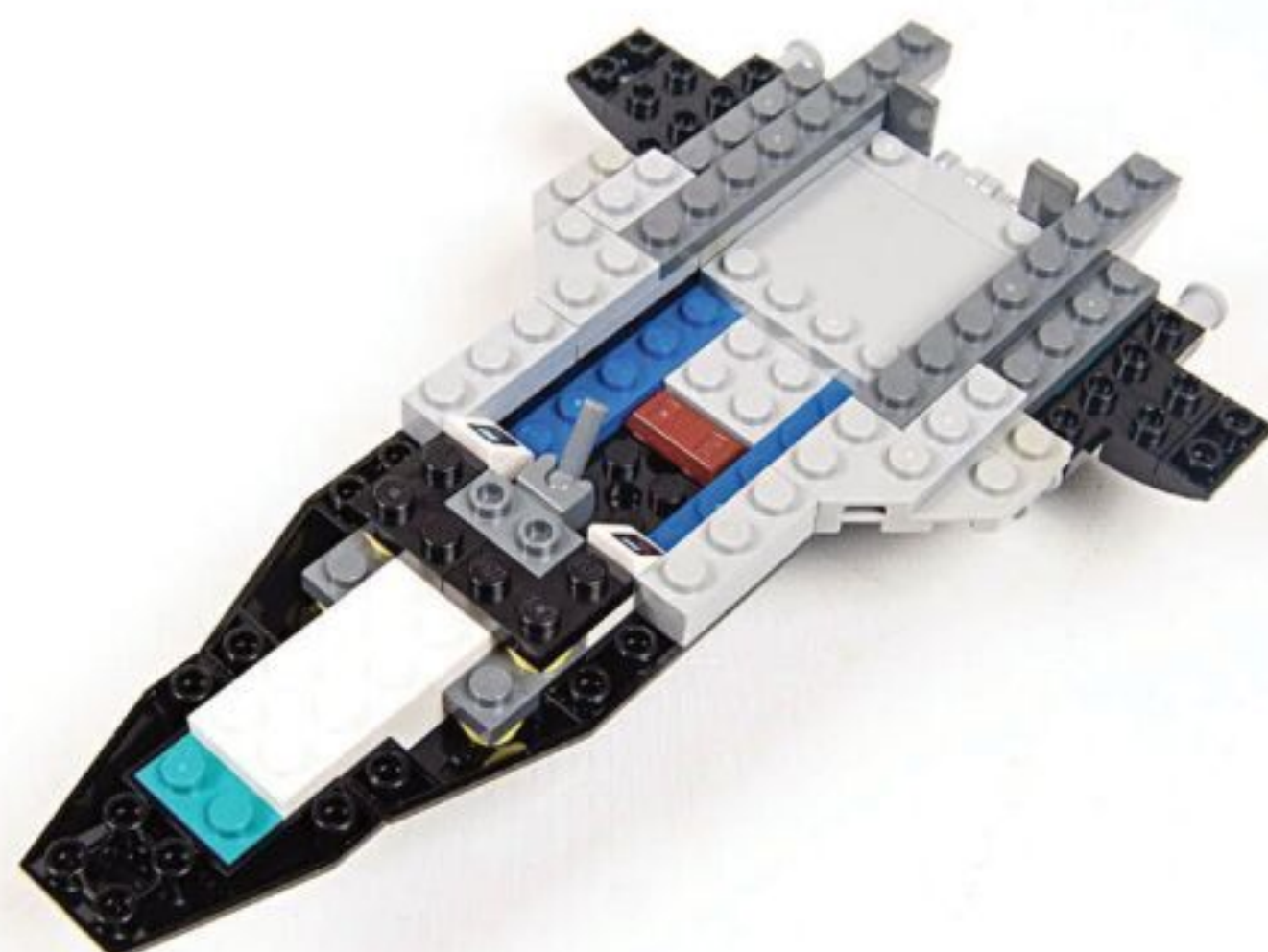
Strip the official model down until it looks like this.

2



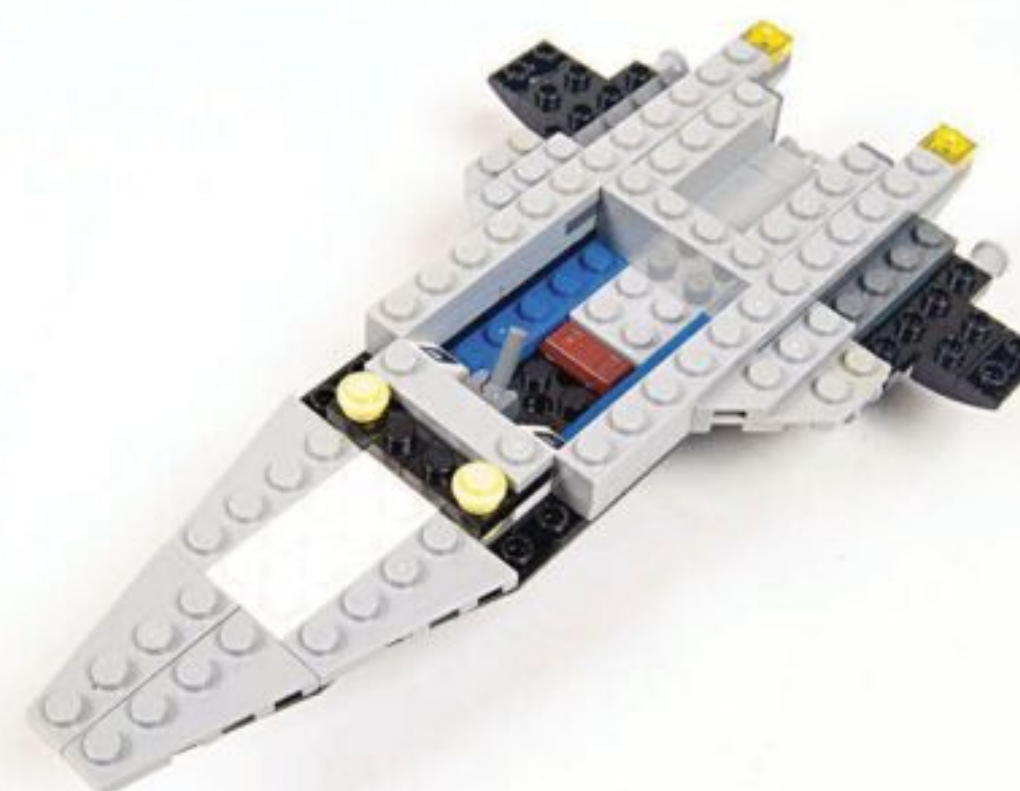
Add some light grey elements.

3



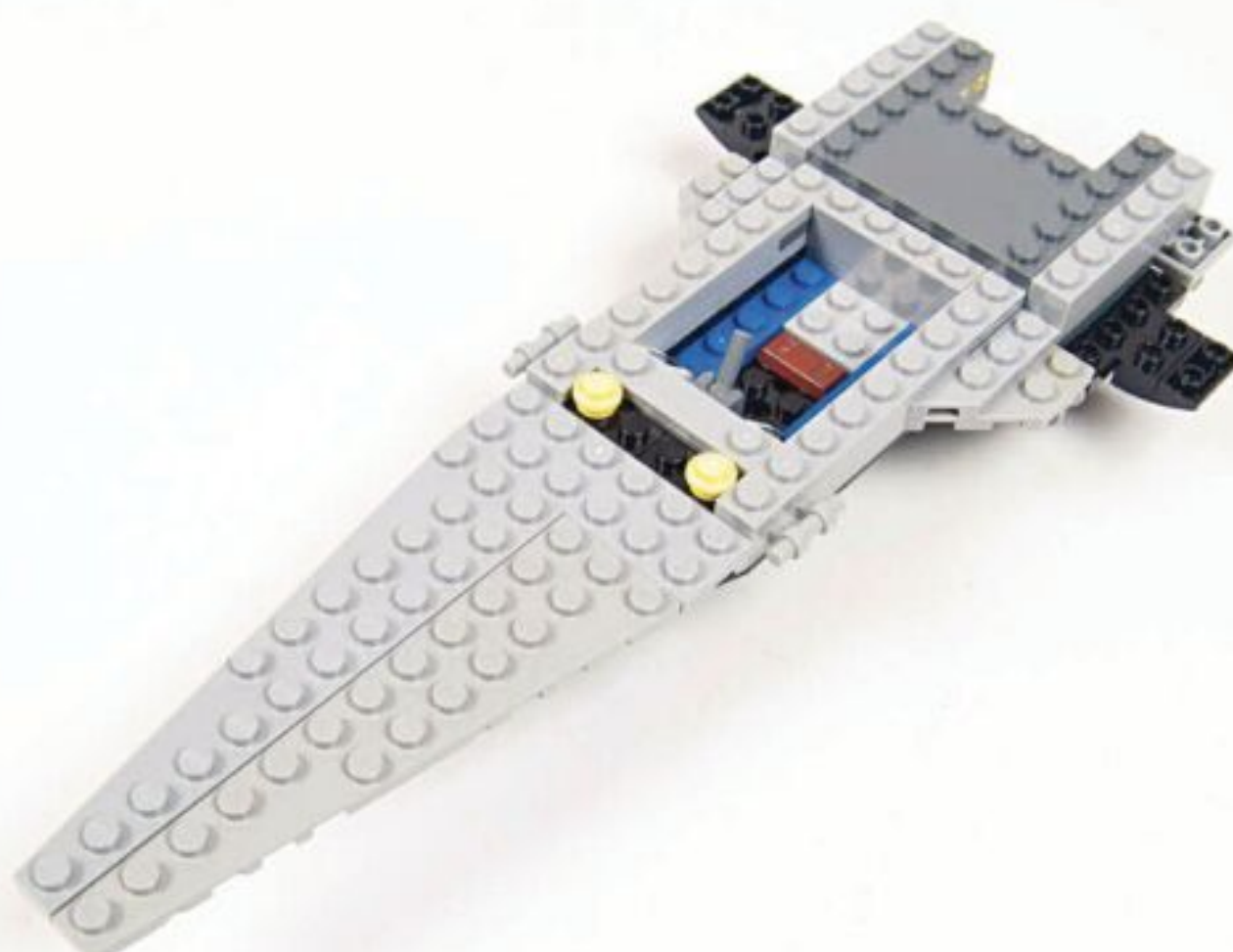
And some dark grey.

4



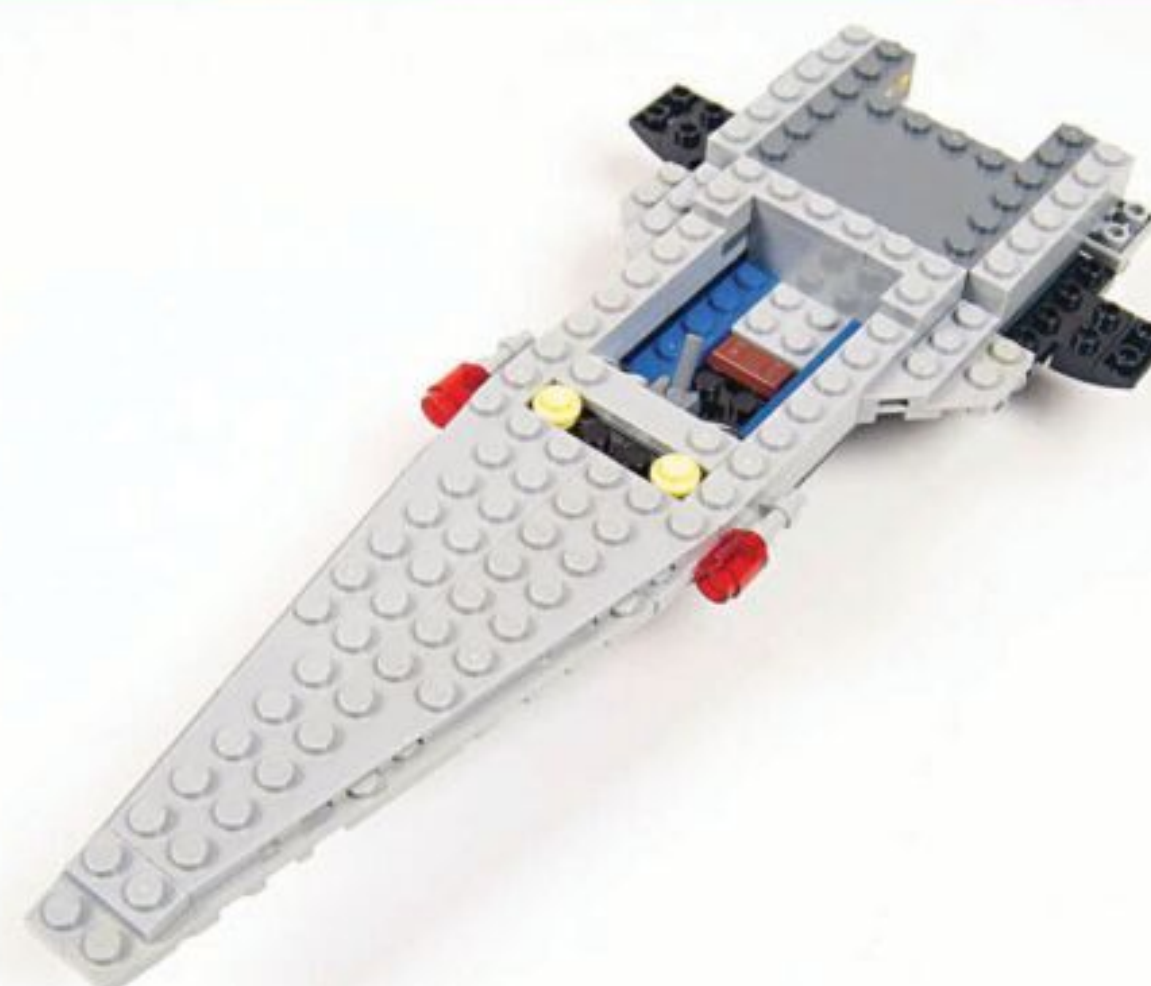
Begin building the nose.

5



Continue extending the nose with large wedge plates.

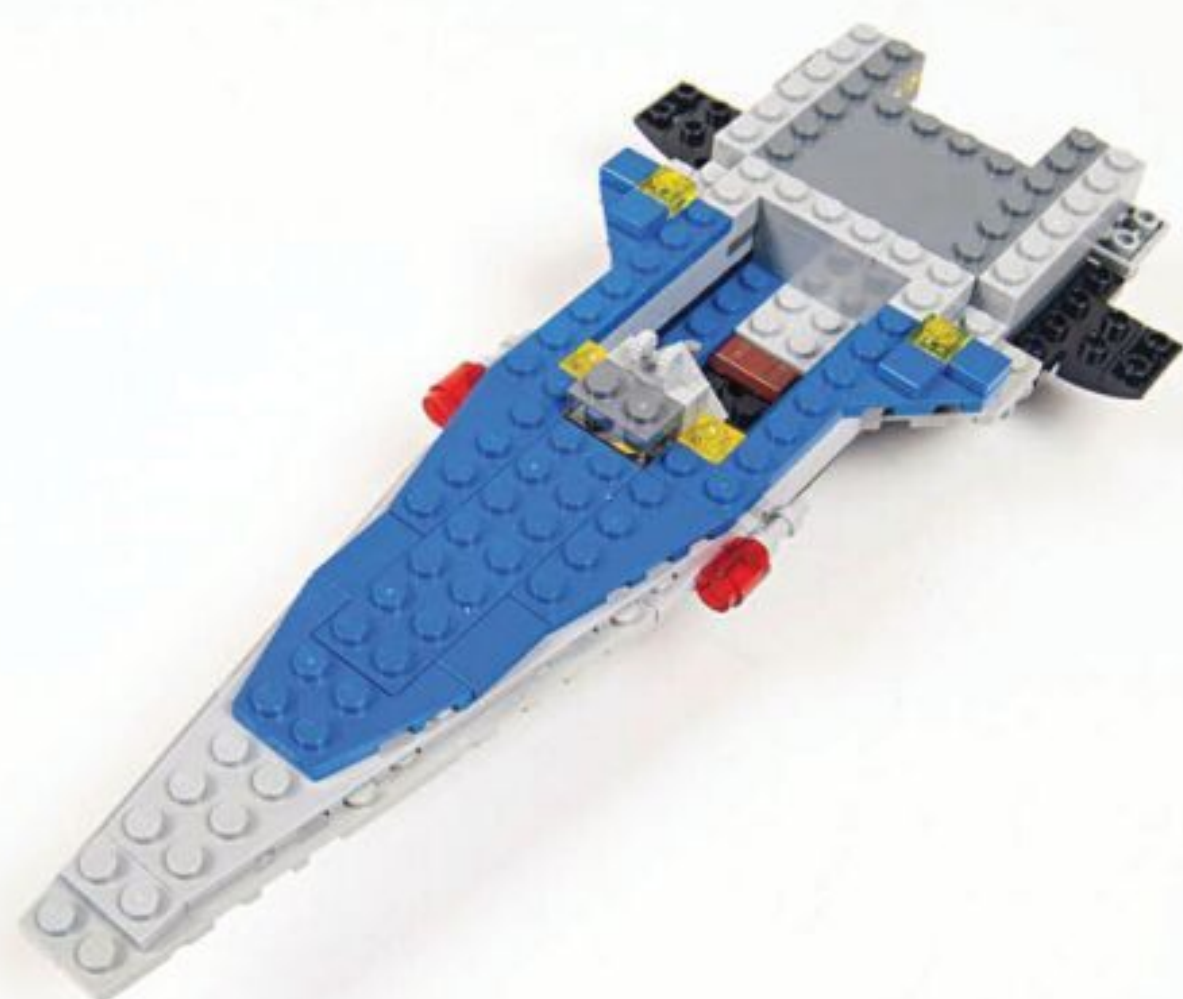
6



Light grey is best, but use what you have.

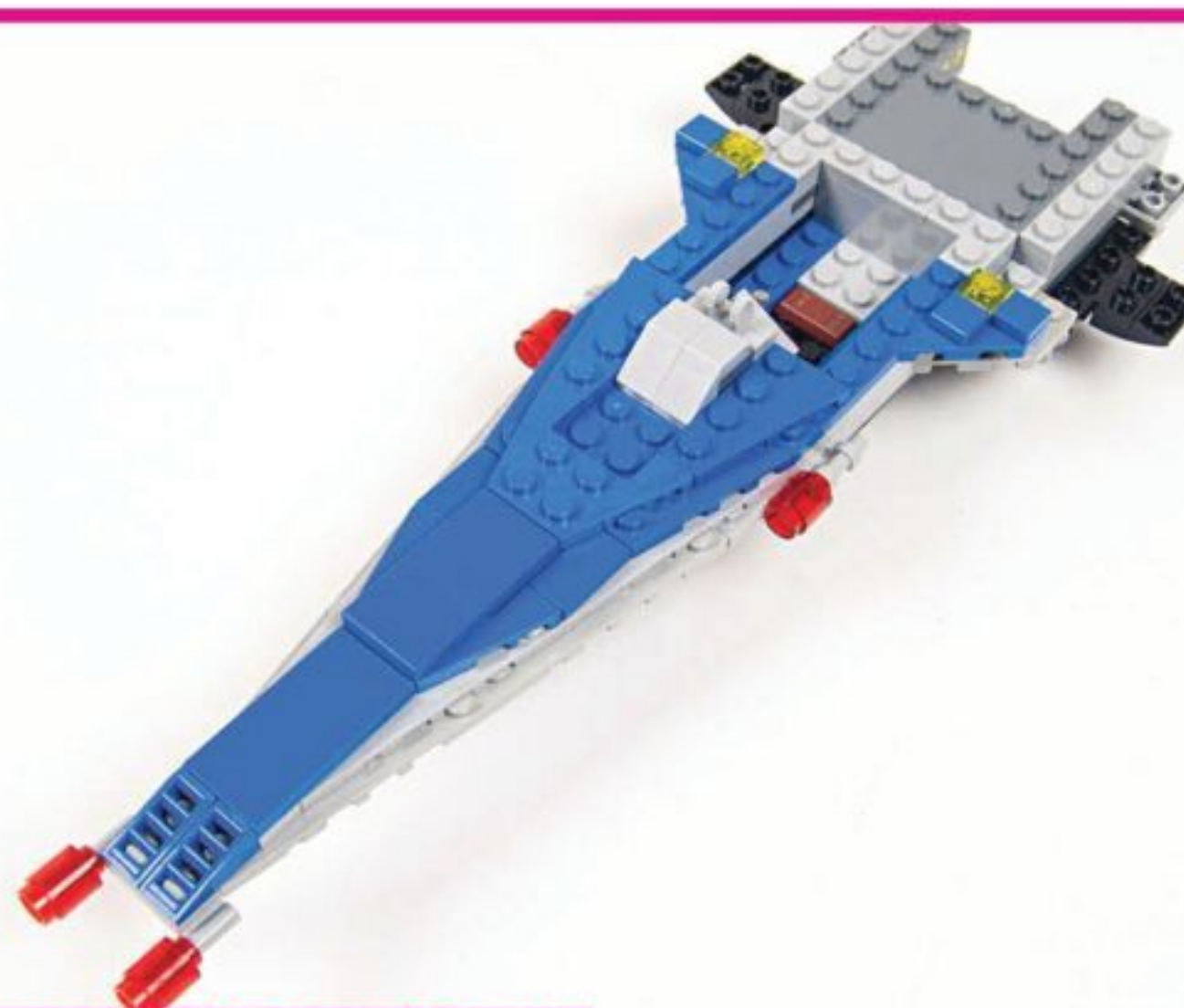


7



The layout is slightly different than the official model.

8



The front is quintessential Classic Space.

9



Build up the back of the ship.

10



This follows the instructions, but colour swapped.

11

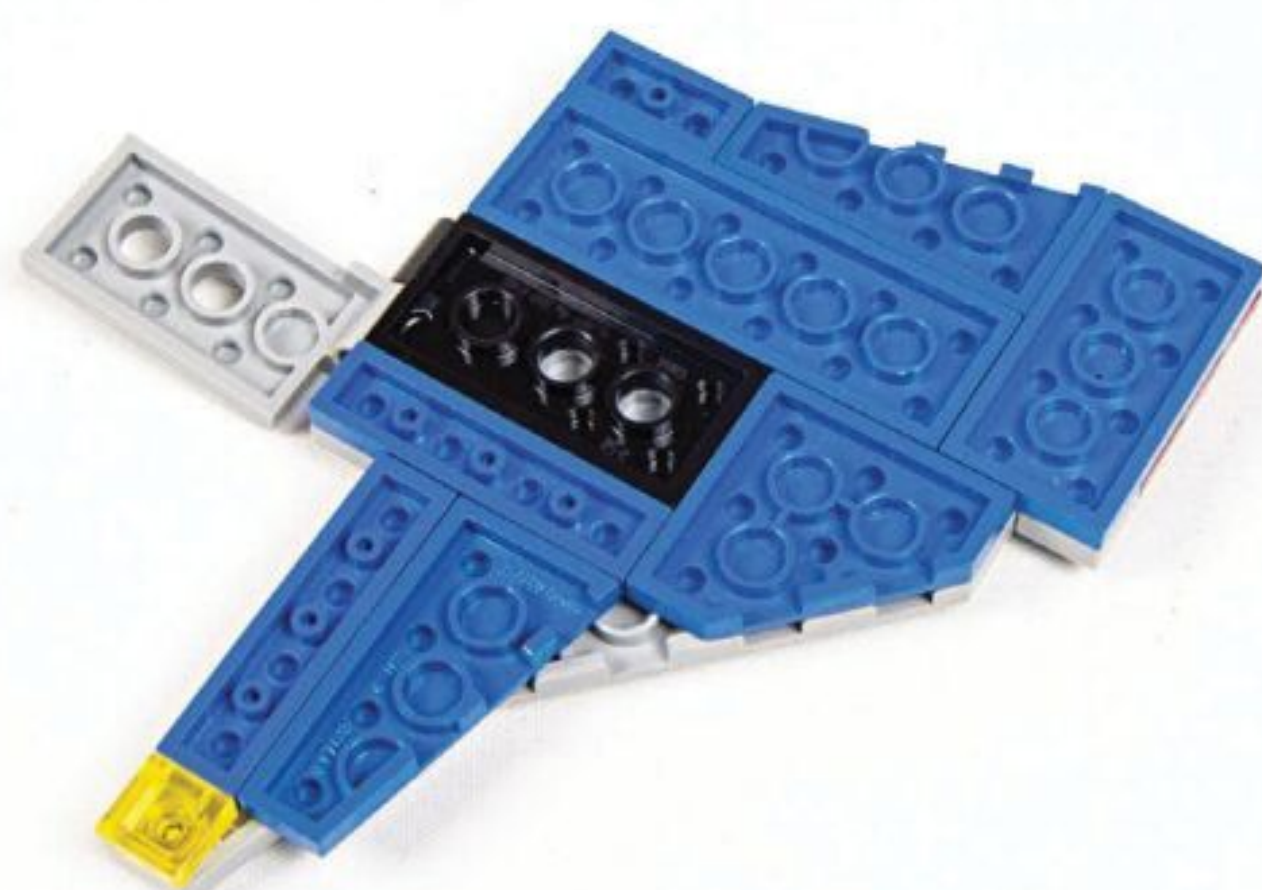


Benny would be getting excited.

## WINGS

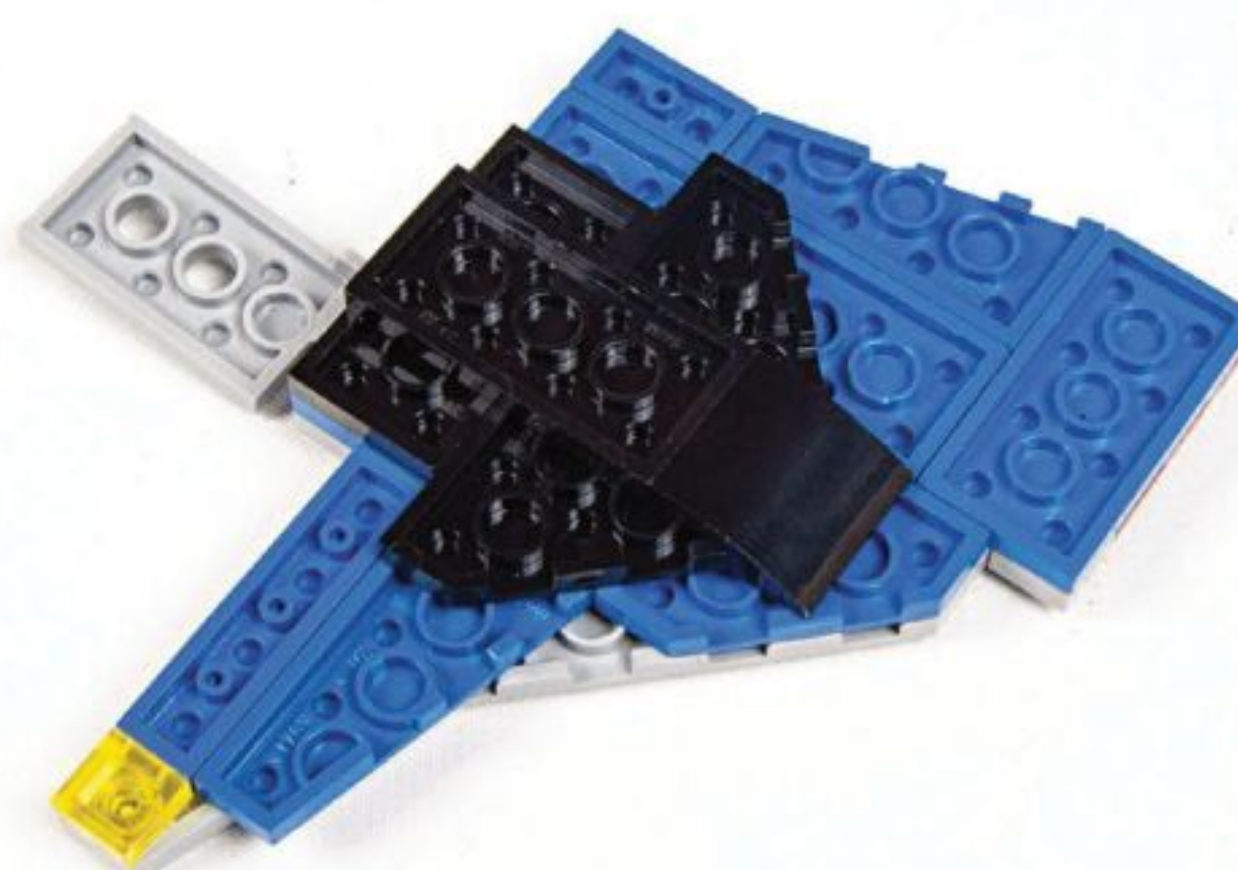
The wings are where the most deviations are required from the original set due to parts not yet being available in the required colours. The shape of them is maintained with a few tweaks, but it is accomplished with a couple of key substitutions.

12



Follow this template.

13



These black elements match the original set.

14



Mirror this for the opposite wing.

15



Yellow and black are a hallmark of Neo Classic Space.



16



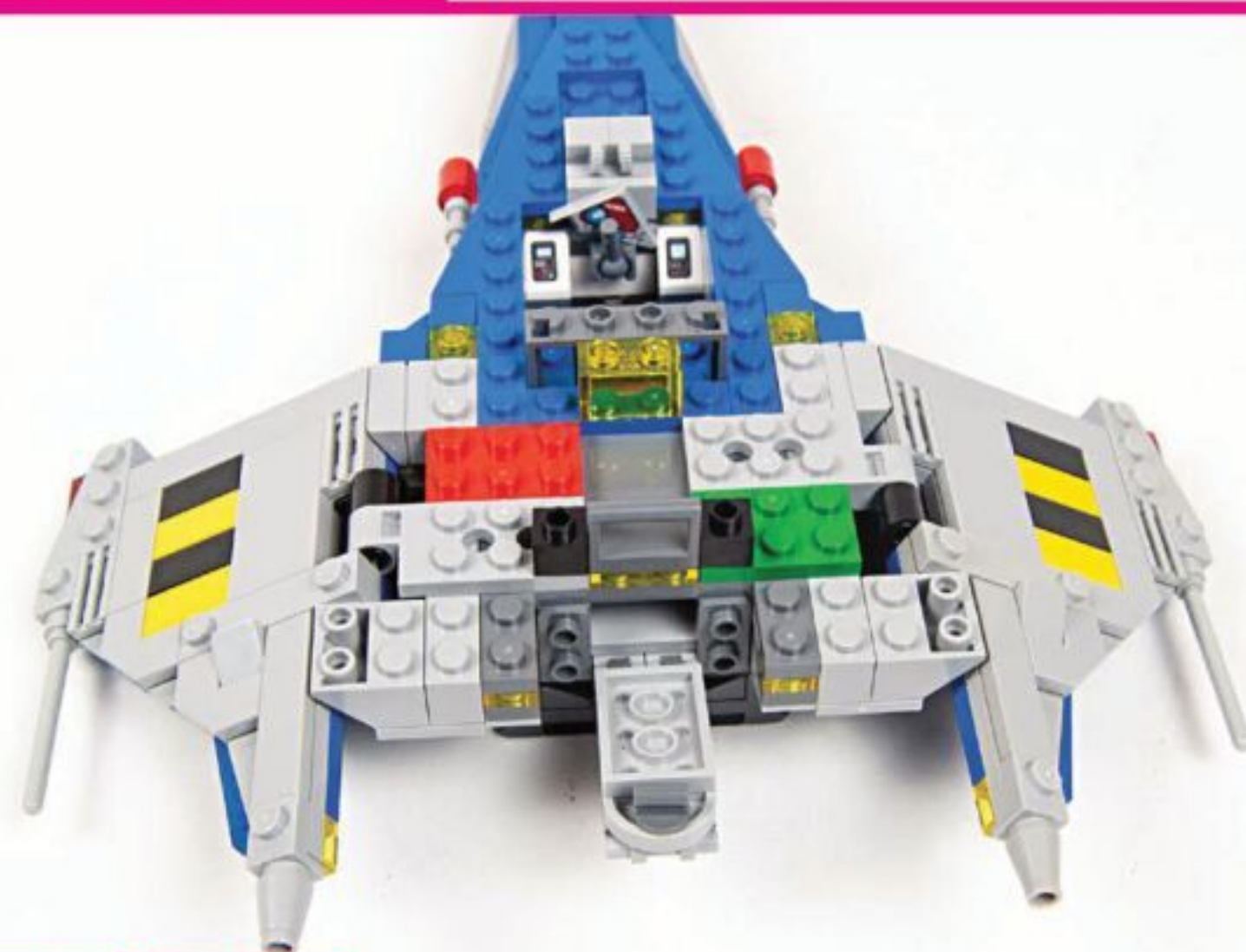
Build a mirrored wing.

17



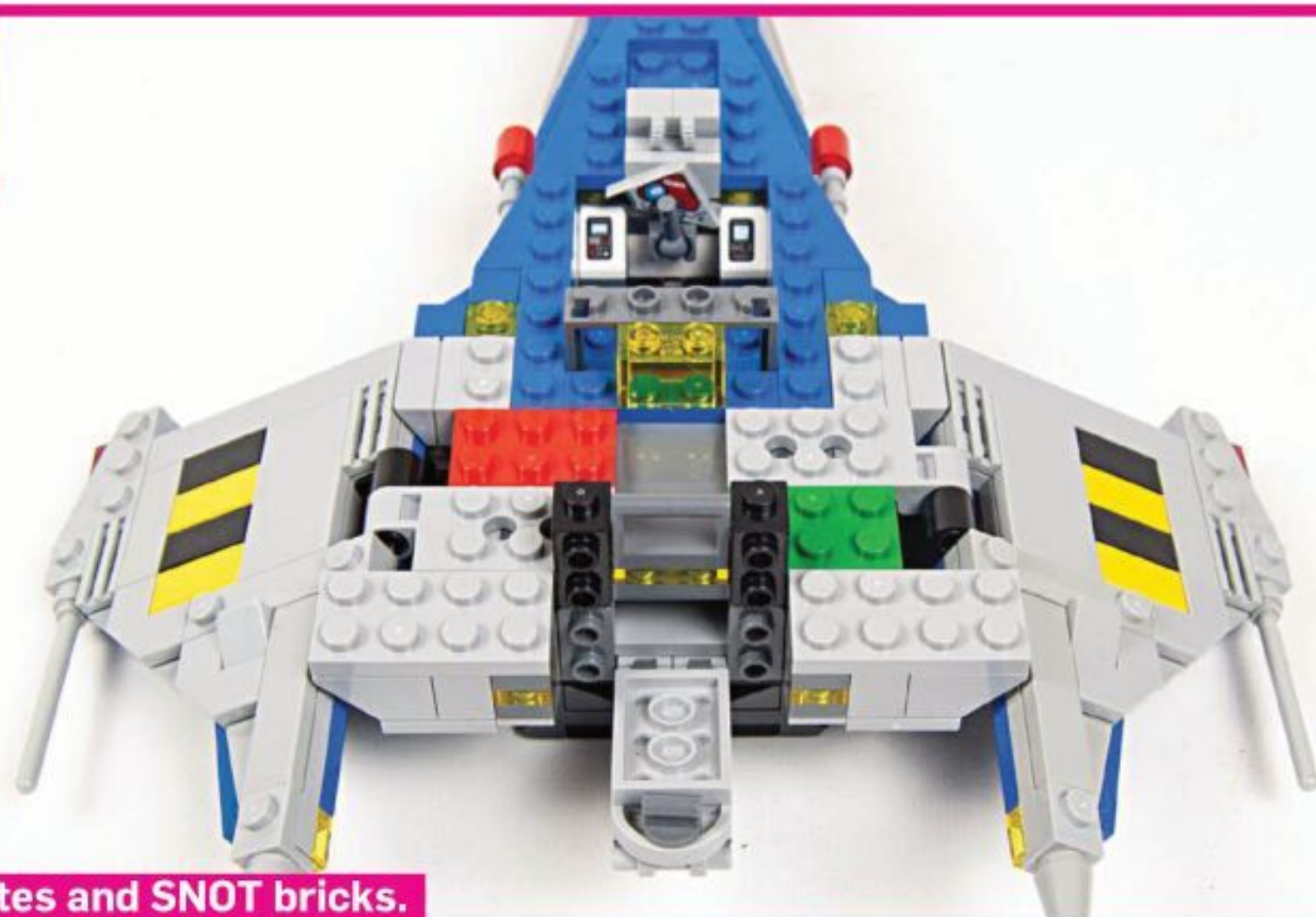
Place the wings onto the model.

18



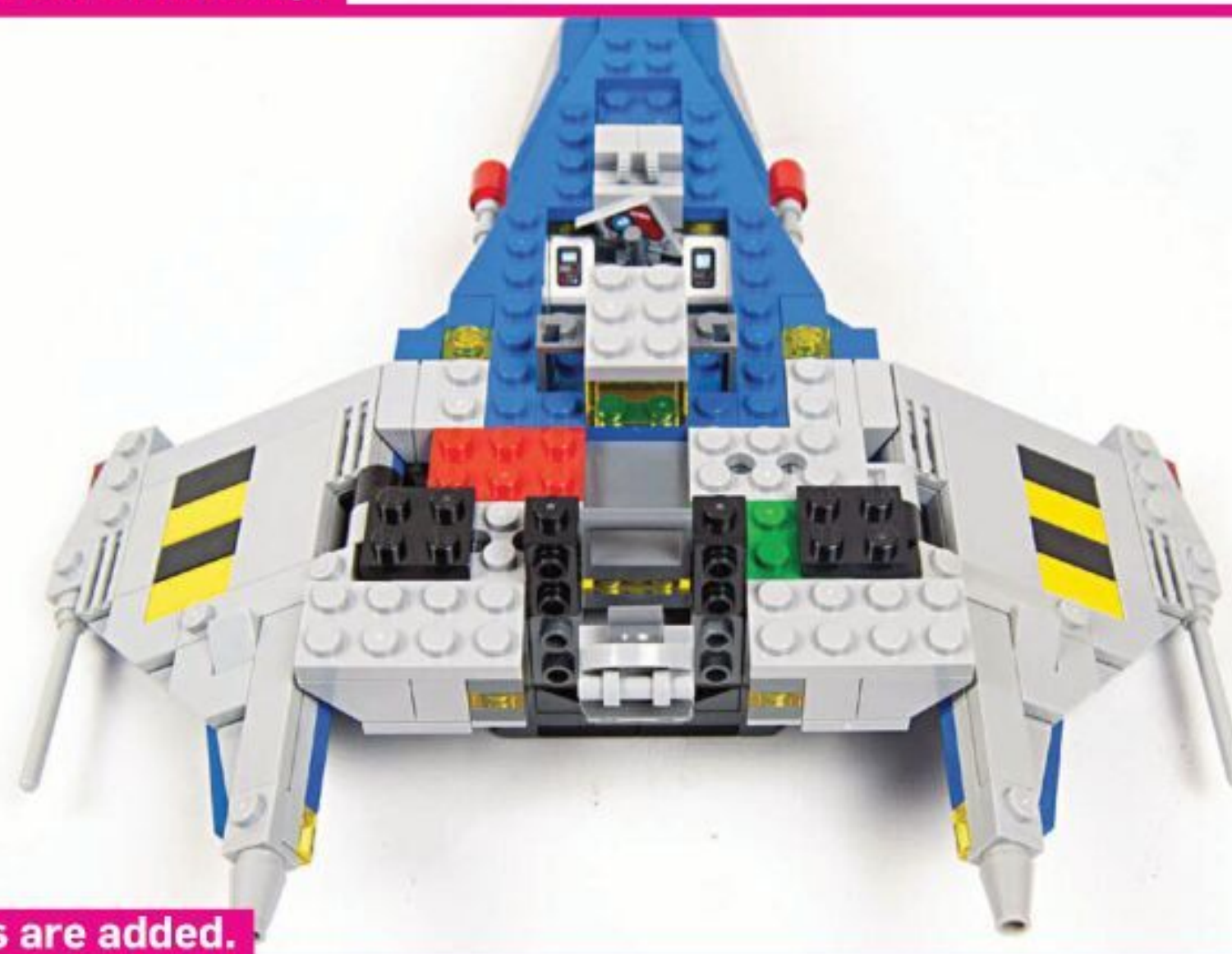
Build up the rear of the ship.

19



Add plates and SNOT bricks.

20



More plates are added.

21



The sand green bricks are reused for the same purpose.

22



Reattach the cockpit. SPACESHIP!

23



Connect the engines, built the same as in the set.

24



Start this little sub-build.

## ENGINES & COCKPIT

With the wings attached, the remaining steps build the engines back up and place the new windscreen. As with the front, much of the build is done as per the original instructions but with a key part swap here and there due to colour restrictions.



25



Add this multi-directional piece.

26



1x1 elements with studs on the sides are paired in opposite directions.

27



The step swaps a light grey element for the white in the original.

28



Add two plates.

29



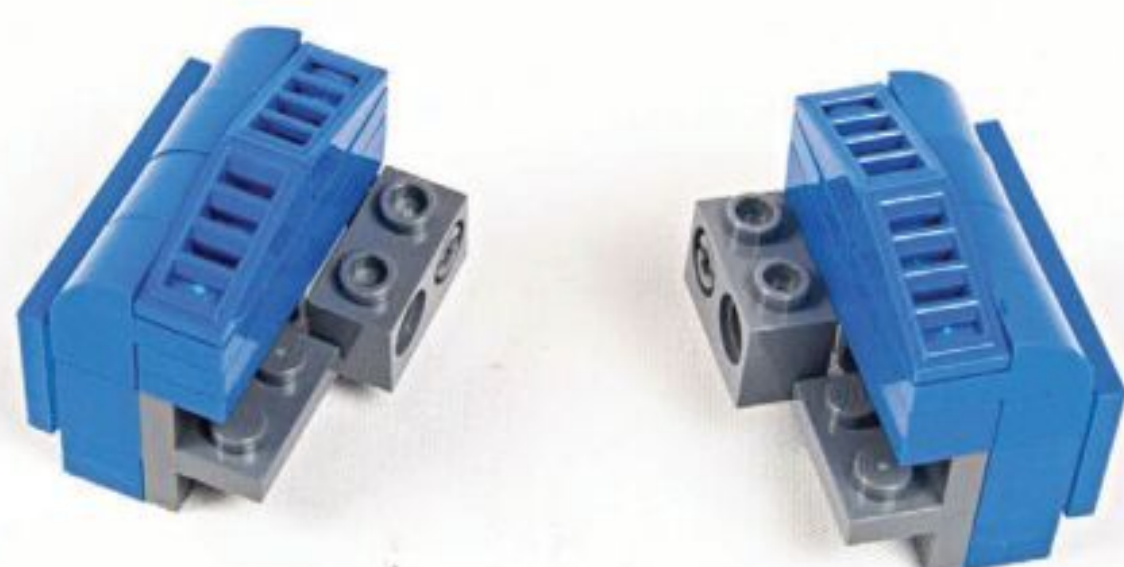
Faceted elements are swapped for curved variants.

30



The 2x4 tile covers the grey element.

31



Mirror the construction for a second one.

32



Place them just like on the original set.

33



Continue the rear build up.

34



Add plates.



35



Add SNOT bricks and cheese slopes.

36



Lay down the base of the tail fins.

37



Jumper plates are key.

38



The set's profile is slimmed down to make it sleeker.

39



The completed model is now ready for swooshing.





## KEY

1X1 PLATE  
WITH CLIP1X1 PLATE  
WITH HANDLE

1X1 PLATE

1X1 ROUND  
BRICK1X1 ROUND  
TILE1X1 TILE WITH  
CLIP1X2 TECHNIC  
BRICK

1X3 BAR



1X6 TILE



2X2 DOME

4X4 ROUND  
TECHNIC4X4 SATELITE  
DISHBAR HOLDER  
WITH CLIP

ERLING

JURASSIC  
HEMISPHERE

POLO



RIBBED HOSE



ROSS

TECHNIC PIN  
WITH STUD

# INVENTIVE BUILDING

Simon Pickard explains the processes and ideas  
behind designing scale models

Words & Pics: Simon Pickard



Karl Benz Motorwagen.



Vintage telephone.



**A VINTAGE TELEPHONE**, a light bulb and a Wright flyer... they may all look different but there's a thematic connection. They are all reproductions of significant inventions, at varying scales. You can push your creative and technical skills much further when building different items. Taking the creative mind beyond its comfort zone will allow you to utilise the new ideas you come up with when you build more familiar subjects.

Scale modelling requires a designer to solve shaping issues at a certain size, a big difference with the more open adaptation available in fantasy and fiction based projects or more generic real world creations.

These examples will demonstrate different ways of thinking about scale models and tips for solving build challenges as you construct them.

## EARLY TELEPHONE

This old world telephone is a very simple looking project. The wooden panel it exists on is almost without character. However, under the surface considerable care still has to be taken.

The placement of studs and holes in the back board didn't need to be right from the outset. More complicated structures can benefit from a simpler outline shape first. The basic rectangle was created so that detailing components could be rested onto the surface in the first instance. Once the right location of attachments was identified, the attachment pieces could be swapped into the template.

The types of connections vary though. Side studded pieces, like the ross, are the obvious and most secure choice. Sometimes a Technic brick is needed instead though, to either offset

the side stud or provide a functional detail.

Using the Technic pin with stud is a less stable option due to the pin's rotational attributes. However, the moving arm of the telephone switchboard took advantage of this swinging nature. Forgoing the pin allows for a stud to be inserted. Rotating the studs was necessary to achieve the top gold texture, and uses the 1x2 Technic brick's hole to connect it together instead.

## KEY CONCEPTS

There is no need to overcomplicate a project from the outset. Make a working template that can act as a starting canvas for detailing and texture.

Plain brown pieces were swapped for side studs or holes.



Some parts were not long enough.



The polo and round brick can connect bar tips and pieces.



They are used to make the hose long enough.



Polos also secure the phone wire in place.



The round plate underside provides the mesh texture.





## TESLA INDUCTION MOTOR

The electric motor presented here takes those core design principles and translates their use into a more three-dimensional approach.

The basic canvas to work from was the 'wooden' cradle but also the black core for the motor. Choosing which to design first is very important. In this instance it was the black motor core as this directly impacts the base. Designing the motor shape dictated the scale of all the other components for the finalised appearance.

The core body is made up of round 4x4 plates and Technic bricks. Not all 4x4 round bricks come with Technic holes. Here I needed them to affix the outer tiles that form the core shape and texture needed. The round plates are used so that the Technic pins with studs align correctly with the connection points on the tiles.

The ends of the motor provided the most interesting and challenging section. The textures required reversed opposing satellite dishes, with

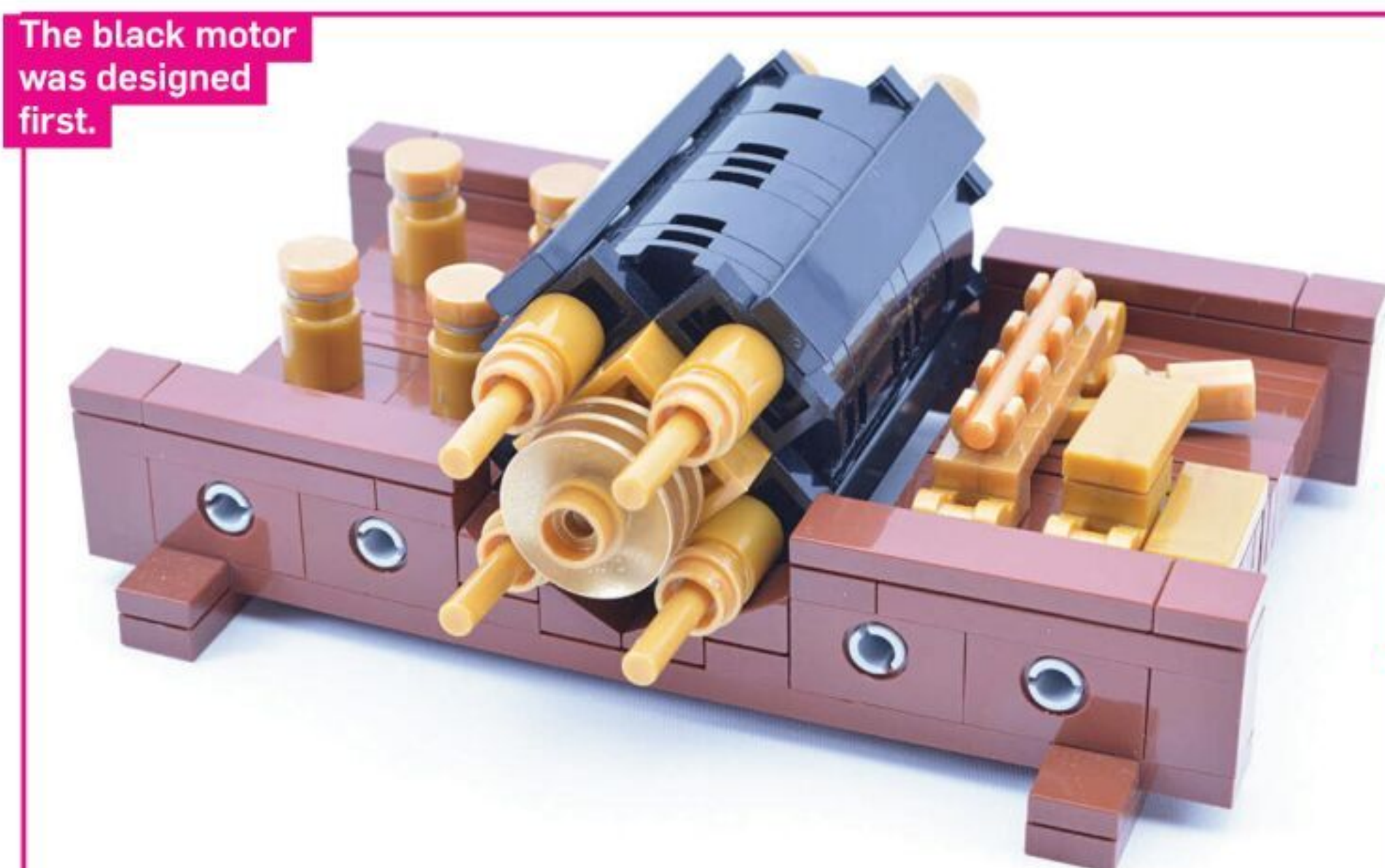
opposing studs on one side. Inserting a bar into the axle hole of the round Technic bricks means the dish can then be placed into a reversed position utilising the hole in its stud. A similar approach engineered the protruding bars and details at the opposite end too.

The base was then designed as a cradle due to the lack of connection points with the motor section. Once the right lengths and widths were established the process switched back to the same one discussed in the telephone segment. It was more complicated with this build to set up the connection points and the images show a variety of the experimental approaches that were explored to get the desired effect.

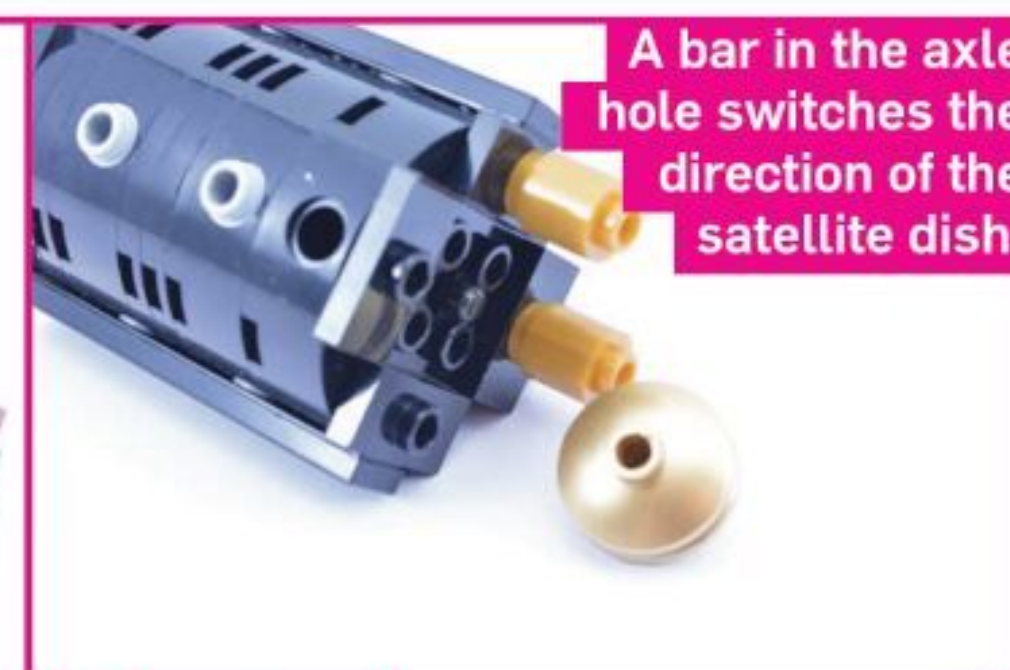
## KEY CONCEPTS

Building up a repertoire of ways to reverse stud directions quickly is essential.

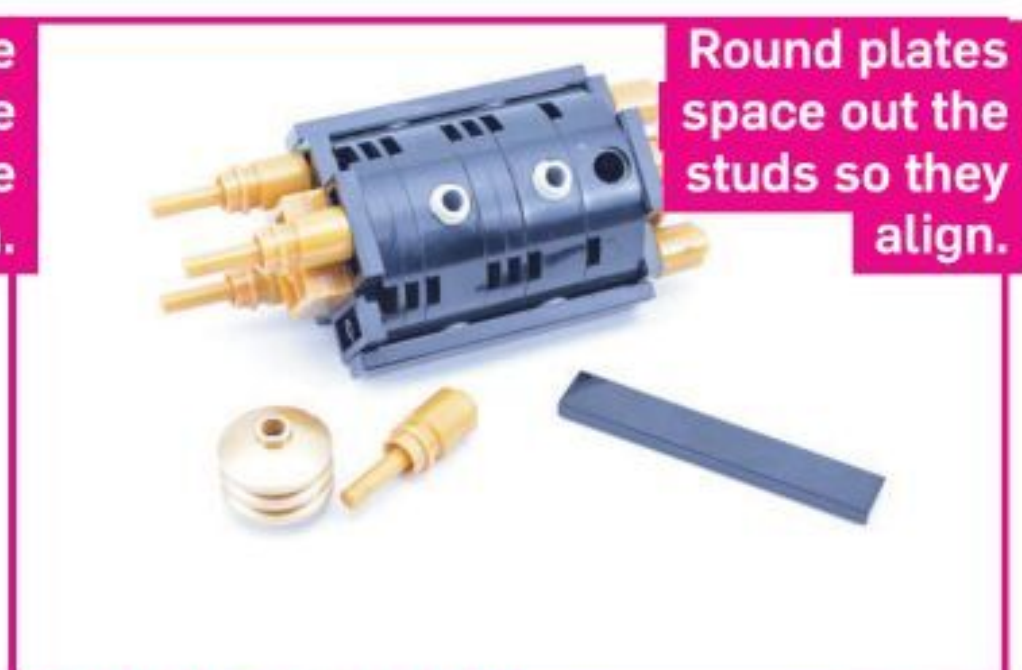
The black motor was designed first.



A bar in the axle hole switches the direction of the satellite dish.



Round plates space out the studs so they align.



The base was designed to the right size for the motor.



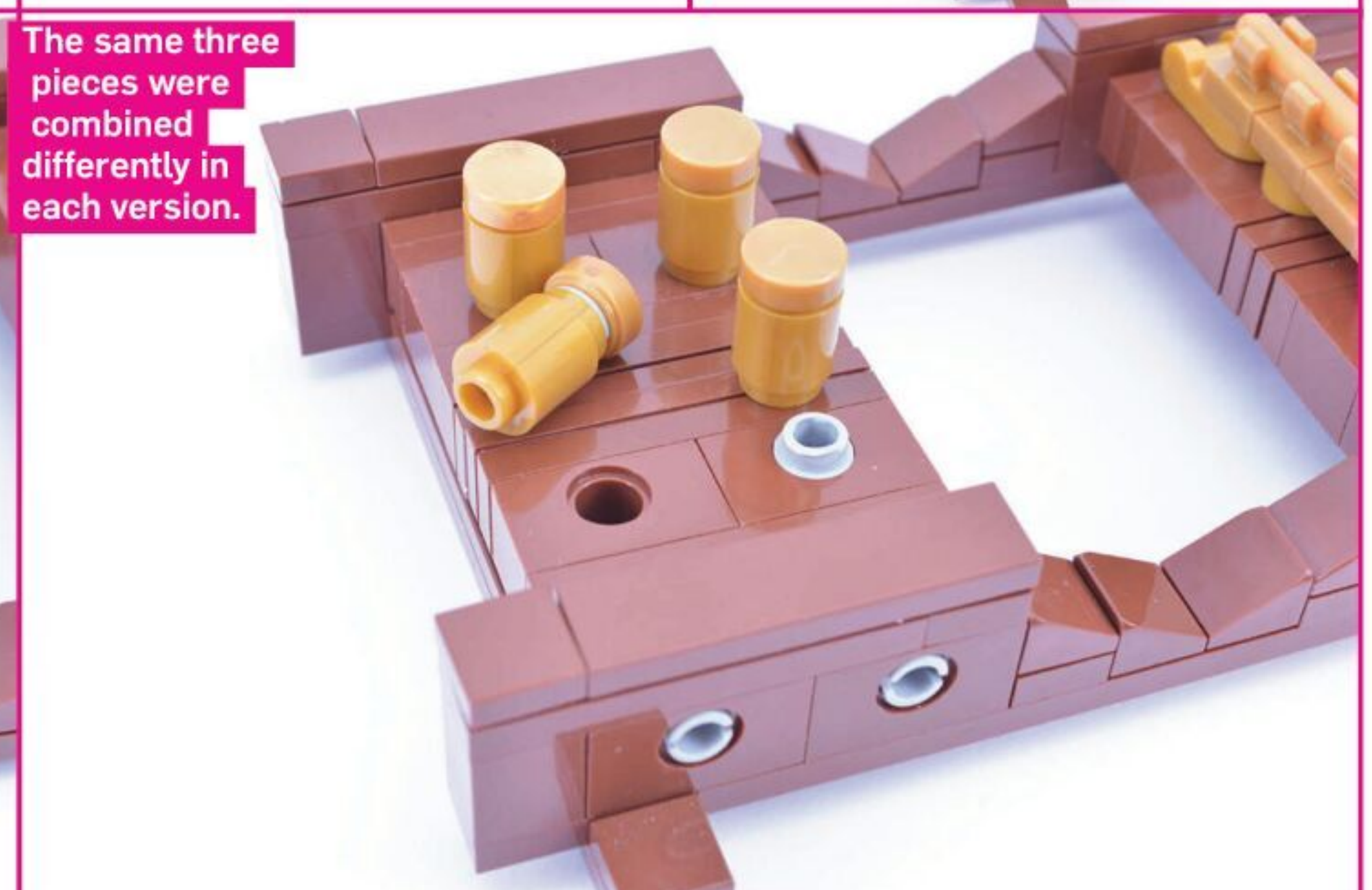
The first approach had little texture.



Adjusting the same pieces allowed for more accurate texturing.



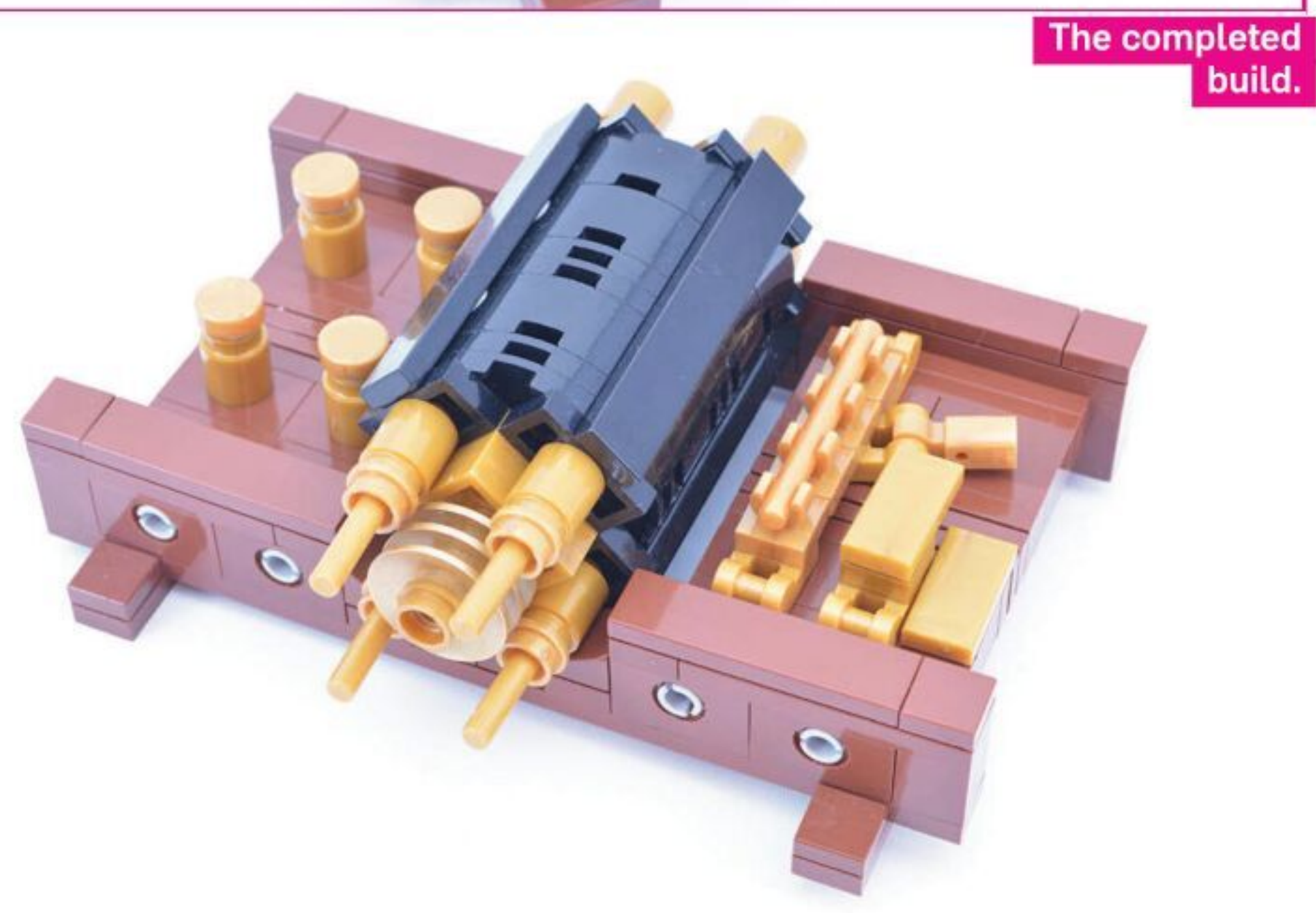
The same three pieces were combined differently in each version.



Tiles and bars add vital detailing.



The completed build.





## EDISON LIGHT BULB

The first aspect of any design is to identify where struggles and problems may occur. The Edison lightbulb's distinctive shape is a good example. The ball shape of the bulb is clearly essential, while the base and cylindrical glass underneath are dependent on this for scale.

The LEGO Jurassic World sets include the Gyrosphere parts, which proved perfect for this design. The two hemisphere pieces do not offer conventional connections though. Axles are needed inside to hold the two halves together. One proved just enough, enabling it to form a portion of the internal filament.

The studs on the outside required more creative thinking so that the

base of the build could be properly connected to the 'glass' segment. Here the filaments provided the solution again. The cylindrical 'neck' has studs facing downwards and finished off with tiles. The base is then topped with tiles for them to rest together. The inside uses jumper plates so that the two bars representing the rest of the filament actually hold the base and glass together.

## KEY CONCEPTS

The design of the most complicated aspects should be solved first. The rest of the process can then be scaled and shaped accordingly.

The ball shaped feature had to be solved first.



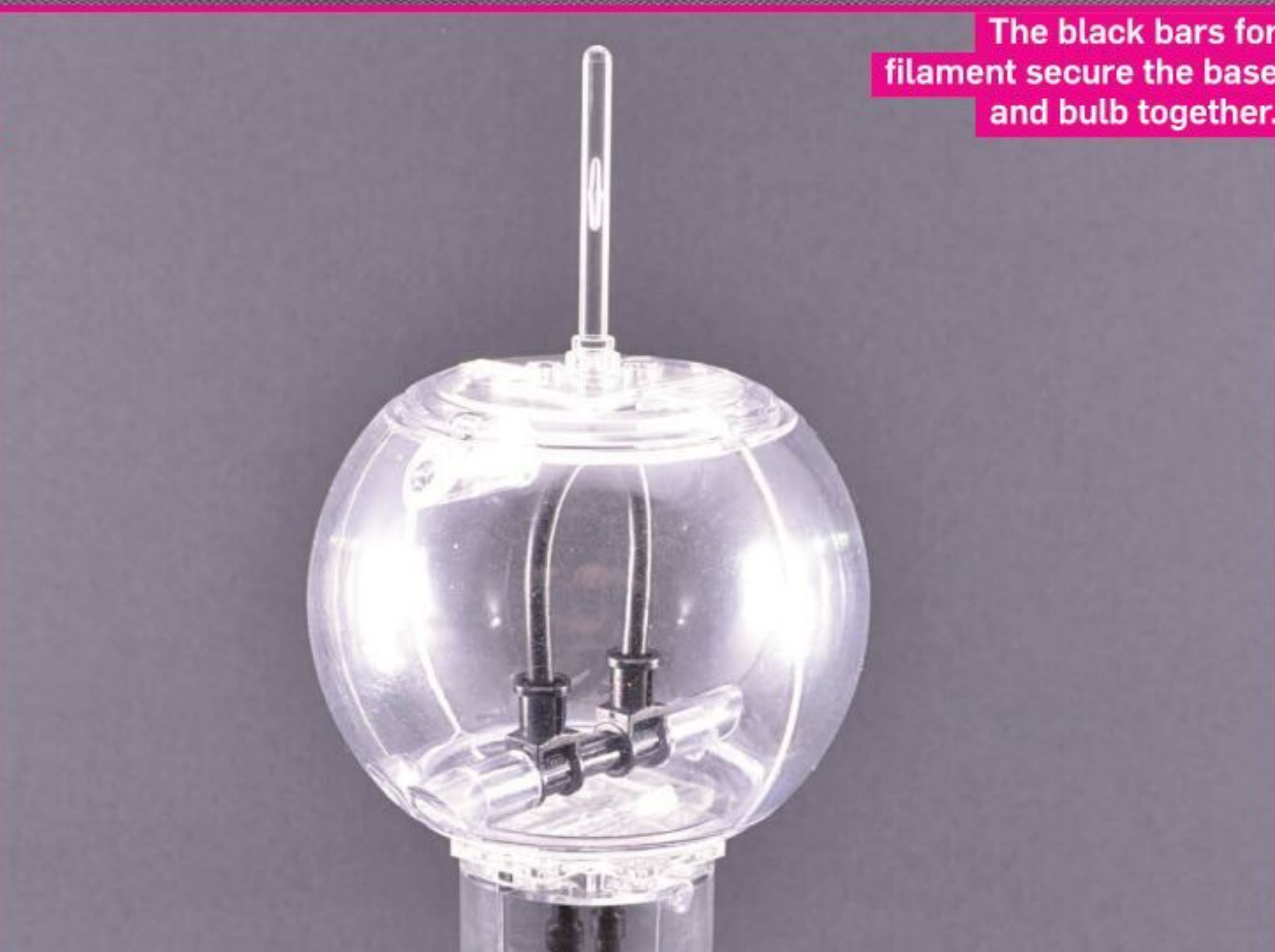
One axle was enough to secure the halves together.



The lower cylinder connects to the studded outside.



The black bars for filament secure the base and bulb together.



Tiles are needed as studs meet at the join point.





## WRIGHT FLYER

The Wright brothers' plane shows a different aspect to scale modelling choices. In previous examples the scale was determined by the type and size of the objects presented; the plane was scaled around the minifigure.

Scale models that work with minifigures require a different thought process. The complexity is born out of their unusual proportions. If you scale to height, everything will become too narrow for the body proportions. If you scale width, the height will become too tall.

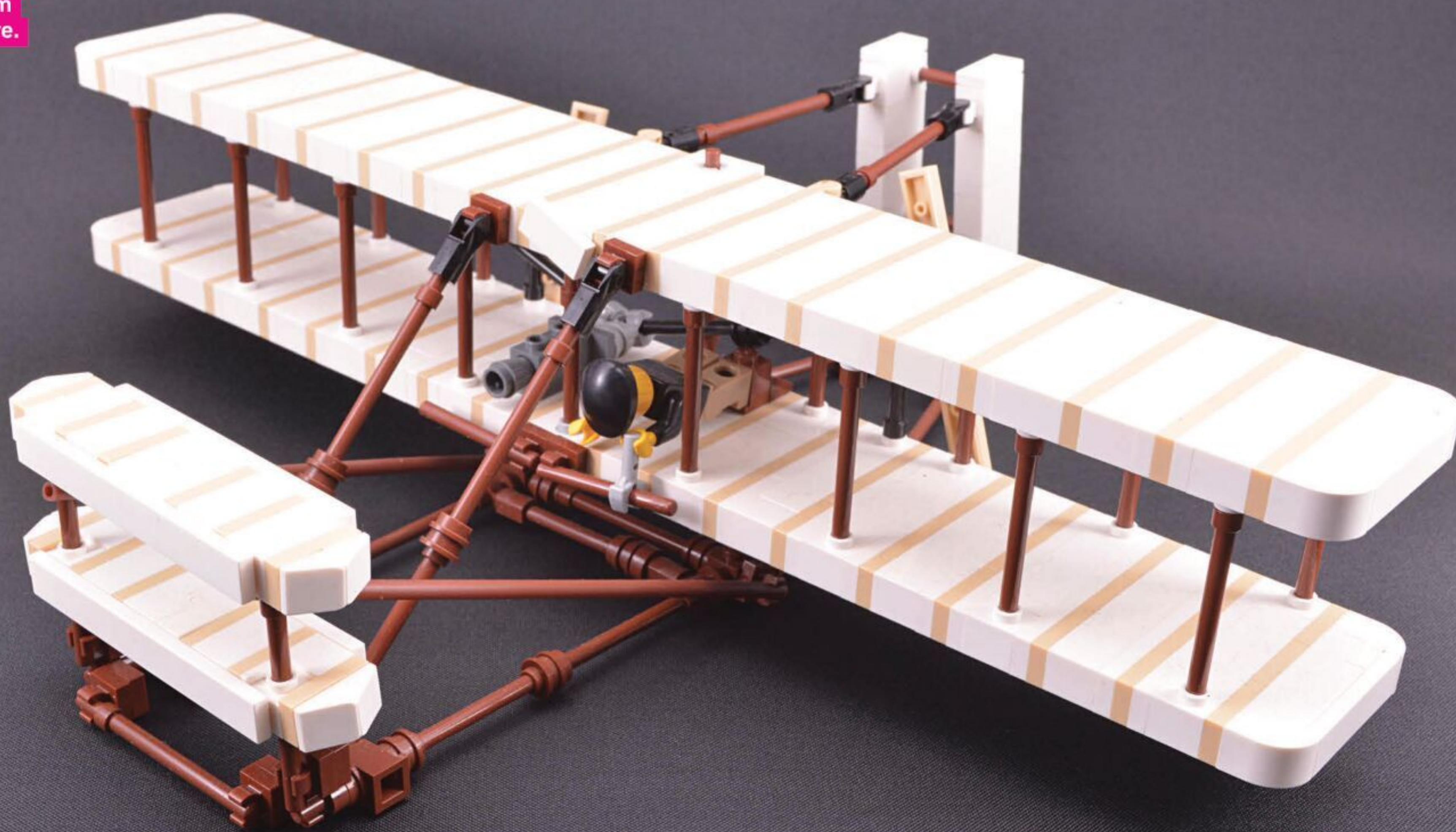
Identifying the best option is unique to each subject matter. Eventually

you get a feel for how to compromise between the two dimensions, which understandably requires practice and experimentation. This plane actually dictated the height for scaling purposes as the pilot connects to controls at the front and back of the wing.

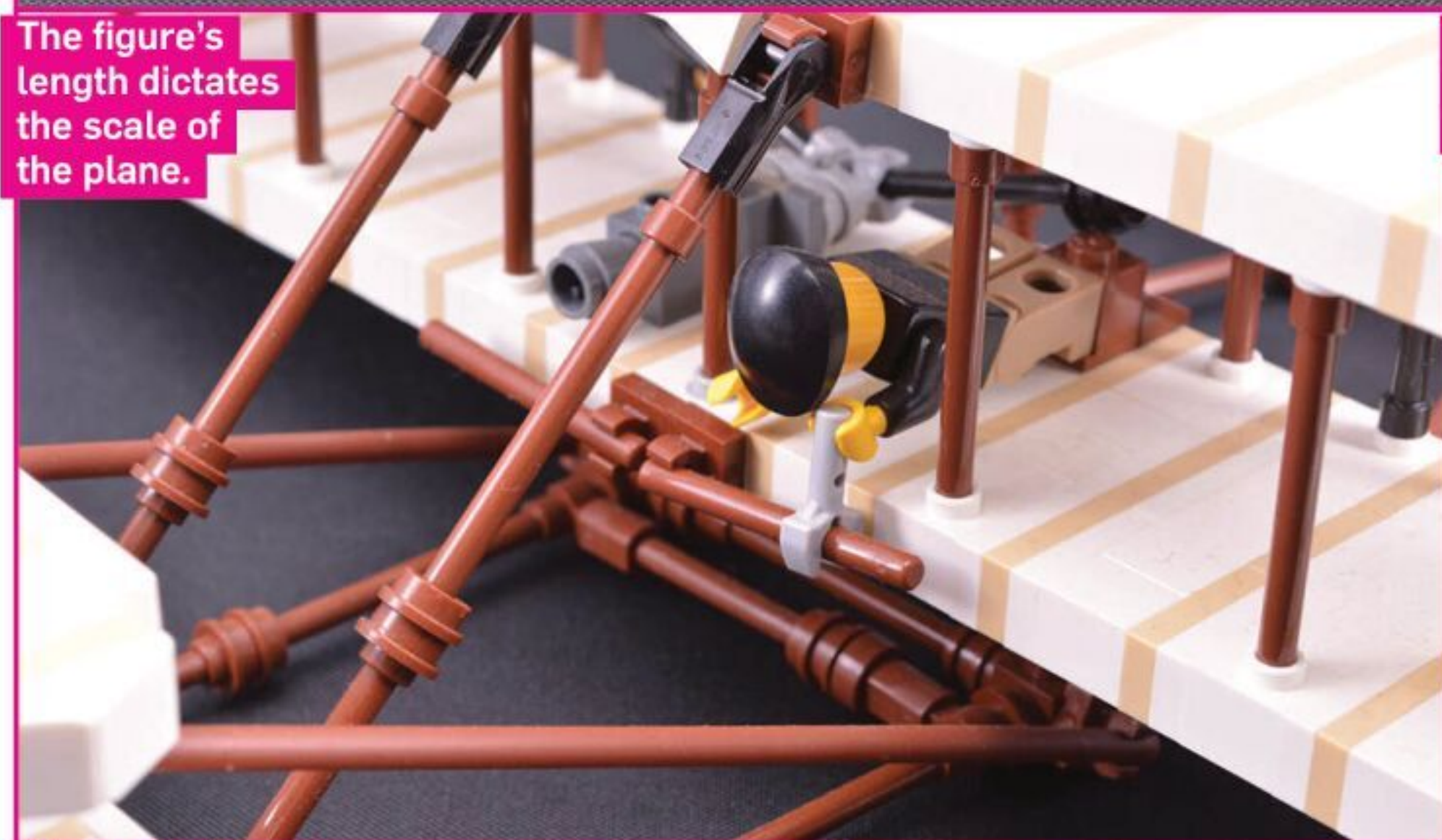
## KEY CONCEPTS

Minifigures make scale modelling less accurate by nature of their unusual proportions, however they often help bring to life the object or provide a better sense of setting and narrative.

The Wright flyer challenges the limits of form and structure.



The figure's length dictates the scale of the plane.



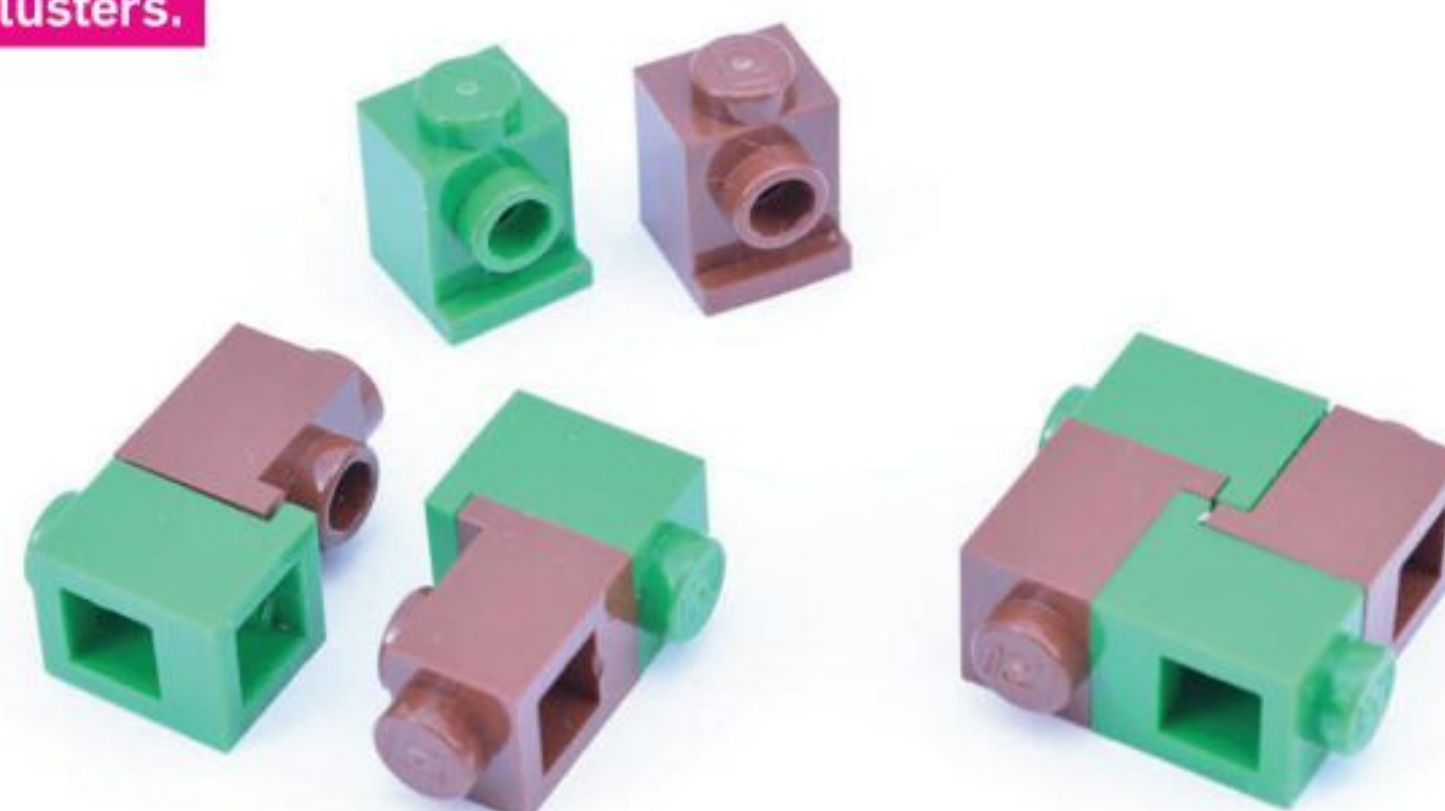
Bars inserted into cross elements create rigidity.



Clusters of erlings clip the opposing wings to the central structure.

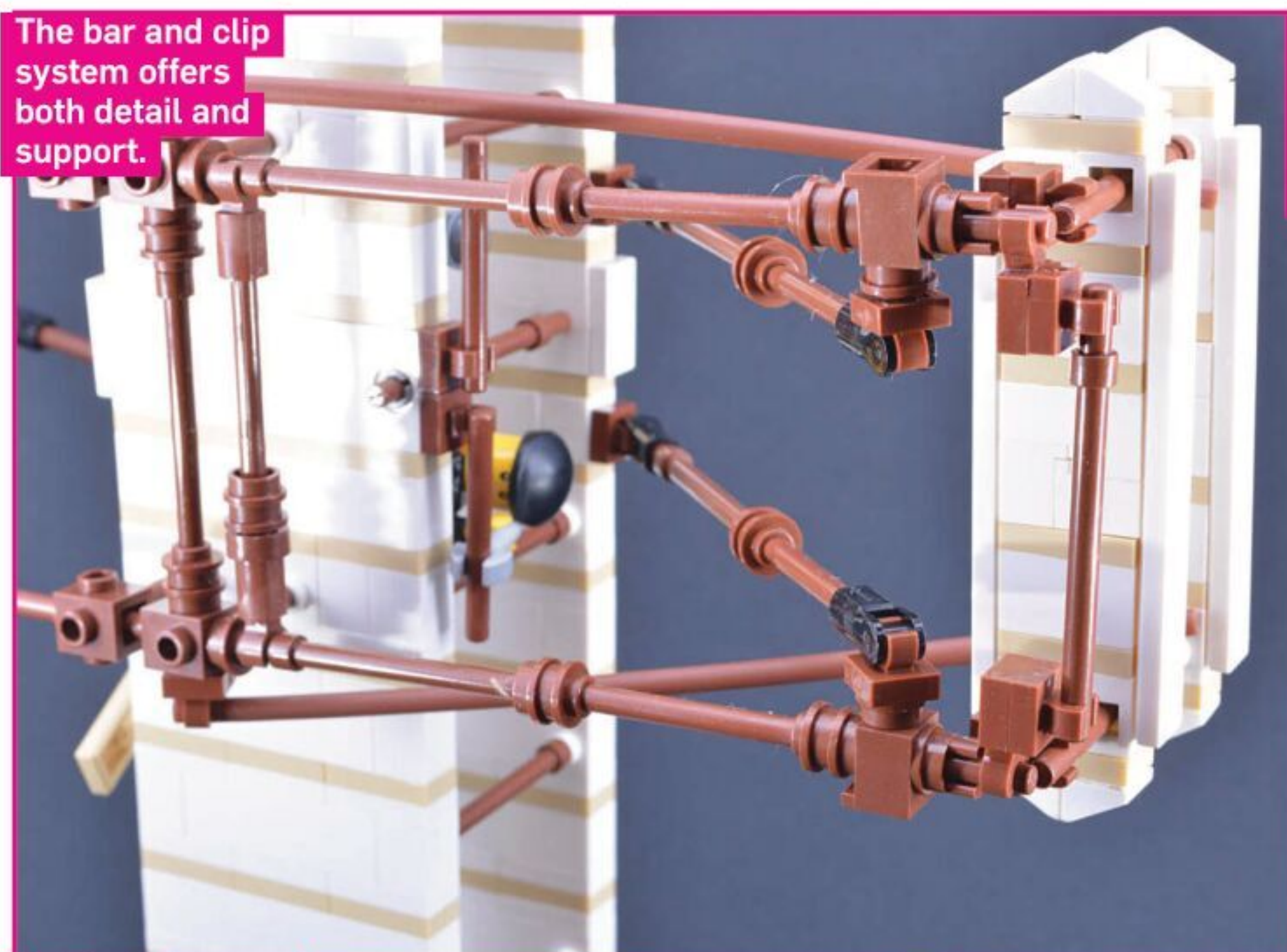


How to build the clusters.





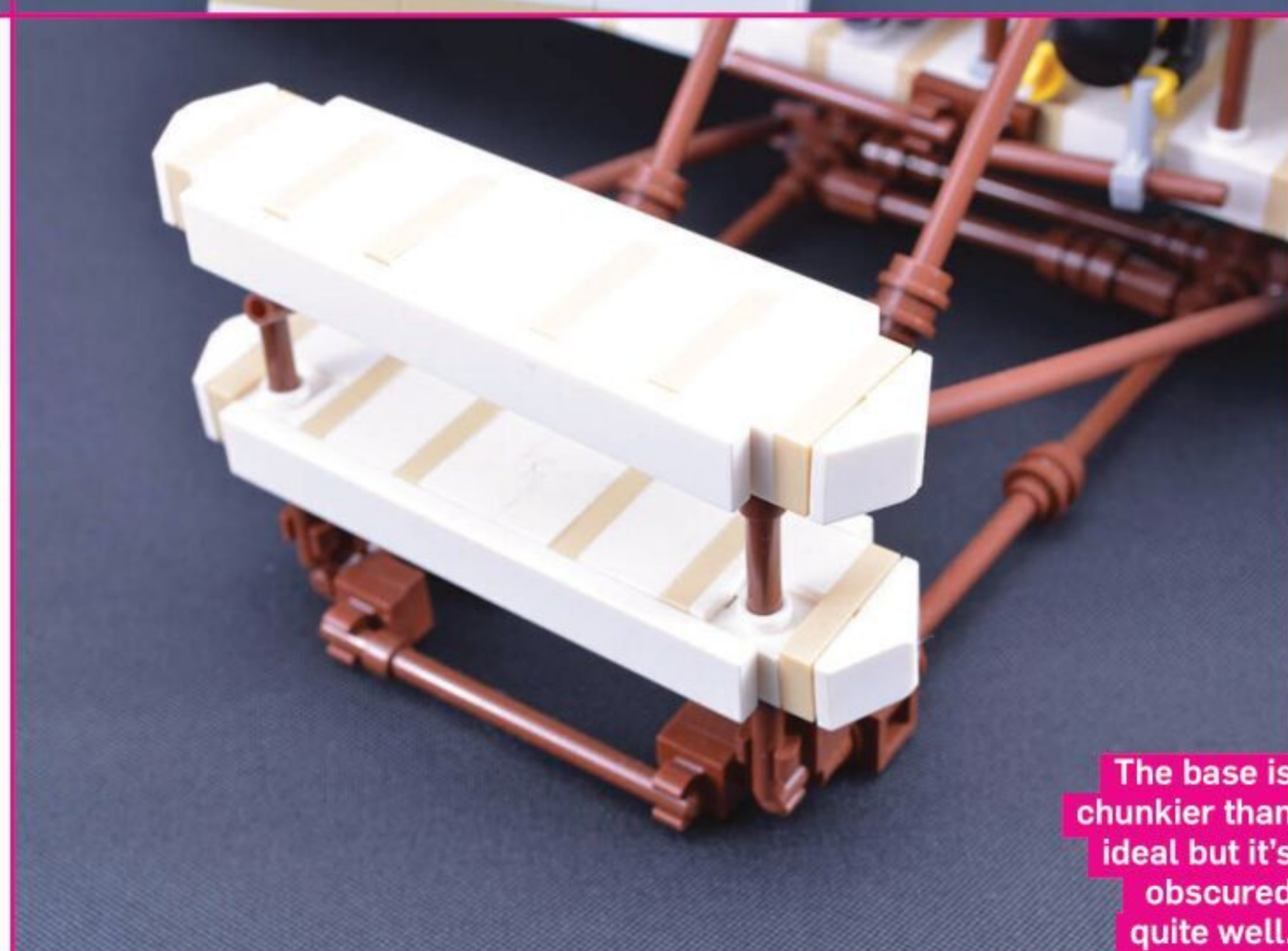
The bar and clip system offers both detail and support.



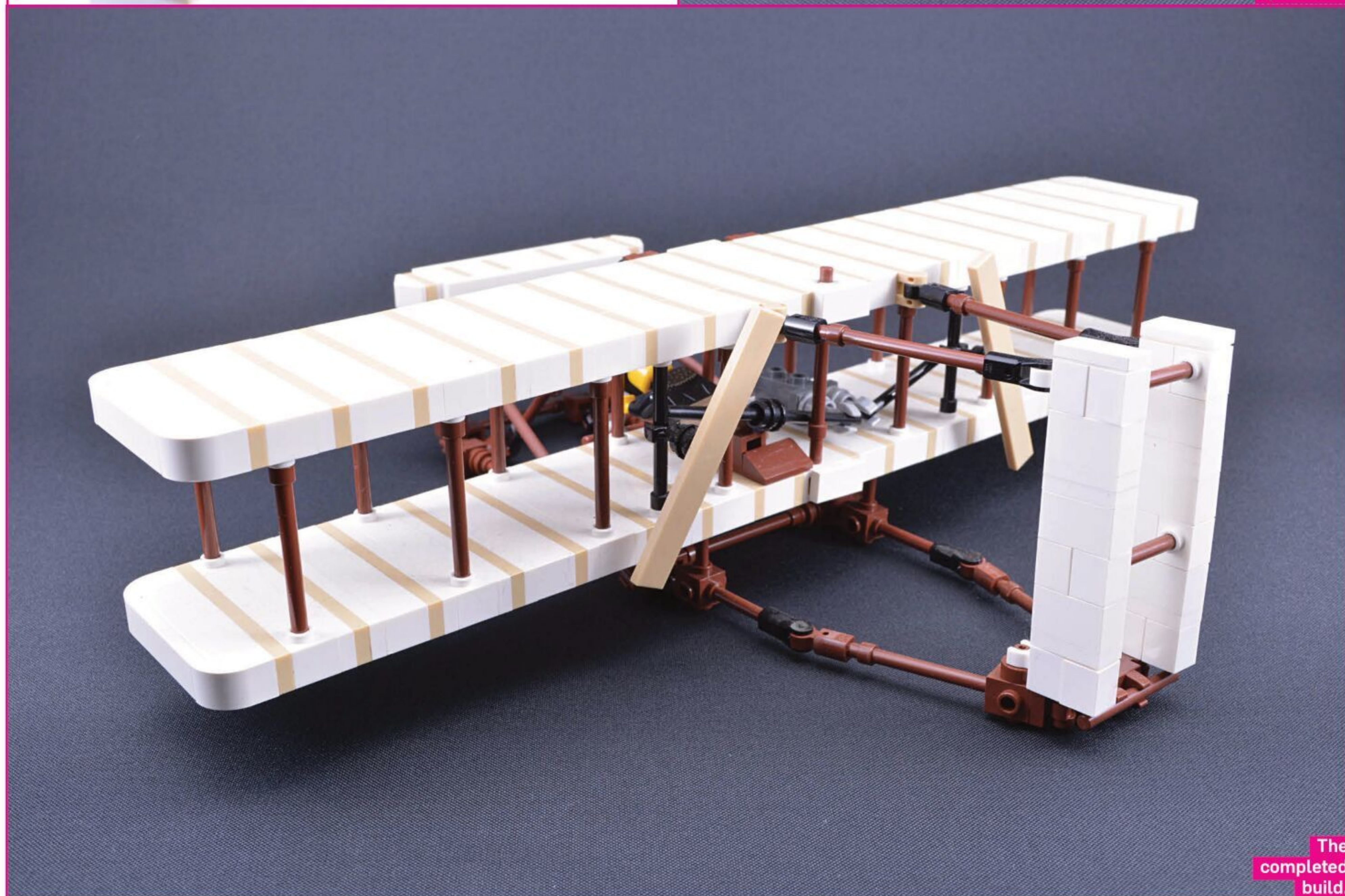
Stud holes increase what the bar and clip system can accomplish.



Subtle twists are possible with these pieces.



The base is chunkier than ideal but it's obscured quite well.



The completed build.



## KARL BENZ MOTORWAGEN

The earliest cars provide some of the most complicated shapes. This model required a creative use of the bar and clip system to fully realise not only the details but also the supportive structure. With little body to work with, the car's frame had to serve both purposes.

The unusual wheels were the key feature that determined the scale. Cart wheels come in a great range of colours and sizes now. Wheels have a wide range of component pieces for attachment to the base. However, in this instance the front wheel could not utilise any of them. This is where the bar and clip system was suitably versatile, acting as both the support to the main frame and the axle too.

The angled footplates and control handles were designed using the bar

and clip system. While the process is very weak and twists out of shape constantly, it became incredibly stable once the final components locked together. This is common in most areas of LEGO element design; one piece can suddenly lock the whole shape into place.

It is worth fiddling with variations of size and shape to find the ideal setup. This is especially important when a framework, like this model has, is so essential to the structural aspect of the design.

### KEY CONCEPTS

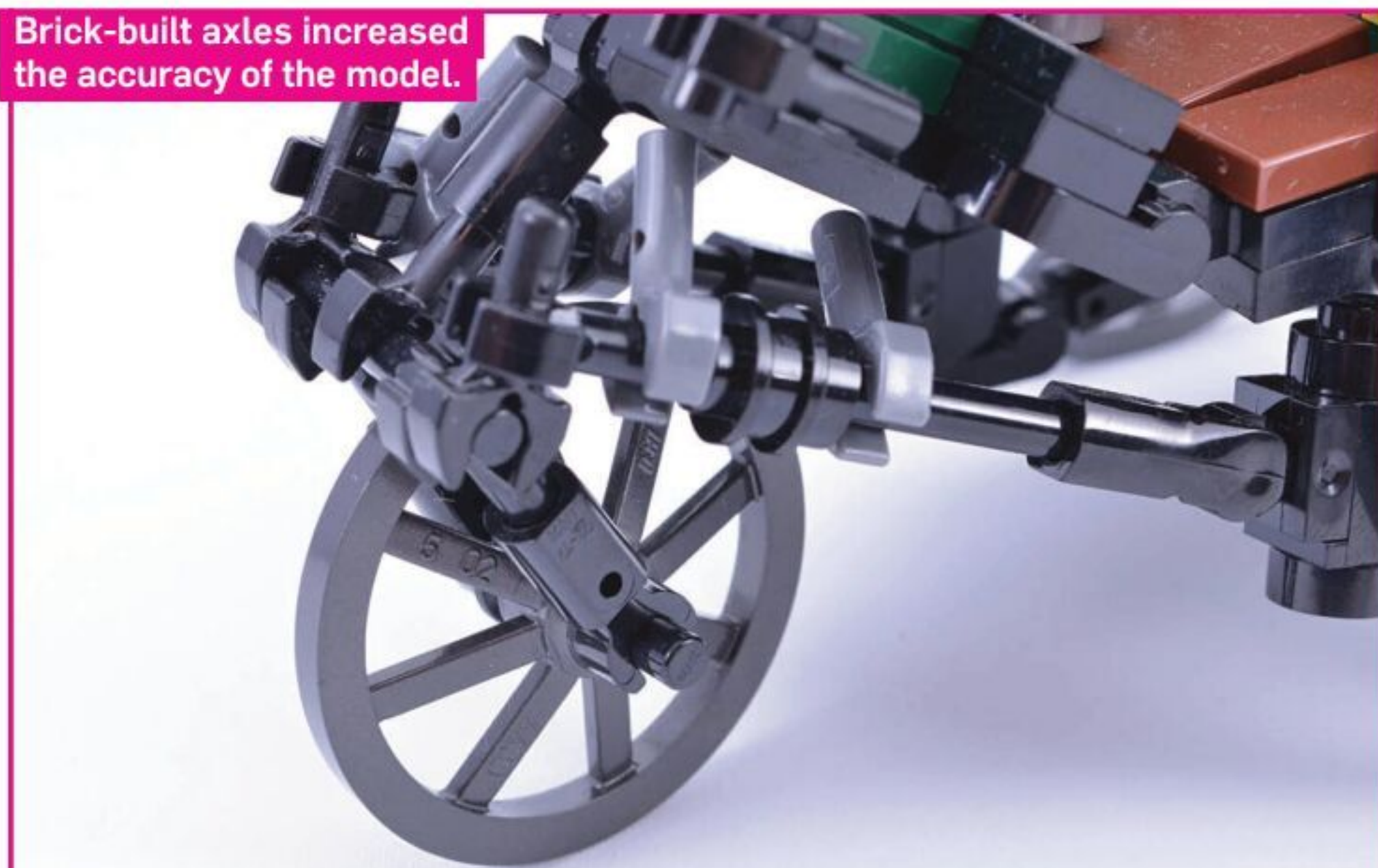
Bar and clip system elements often provide essential details while simultaneously supporting the structure of unusual shapes. ■

## THE DESIGN OF THE MOST COMPLICATED ASPECTS SHOULD BE SOLVED FIRST

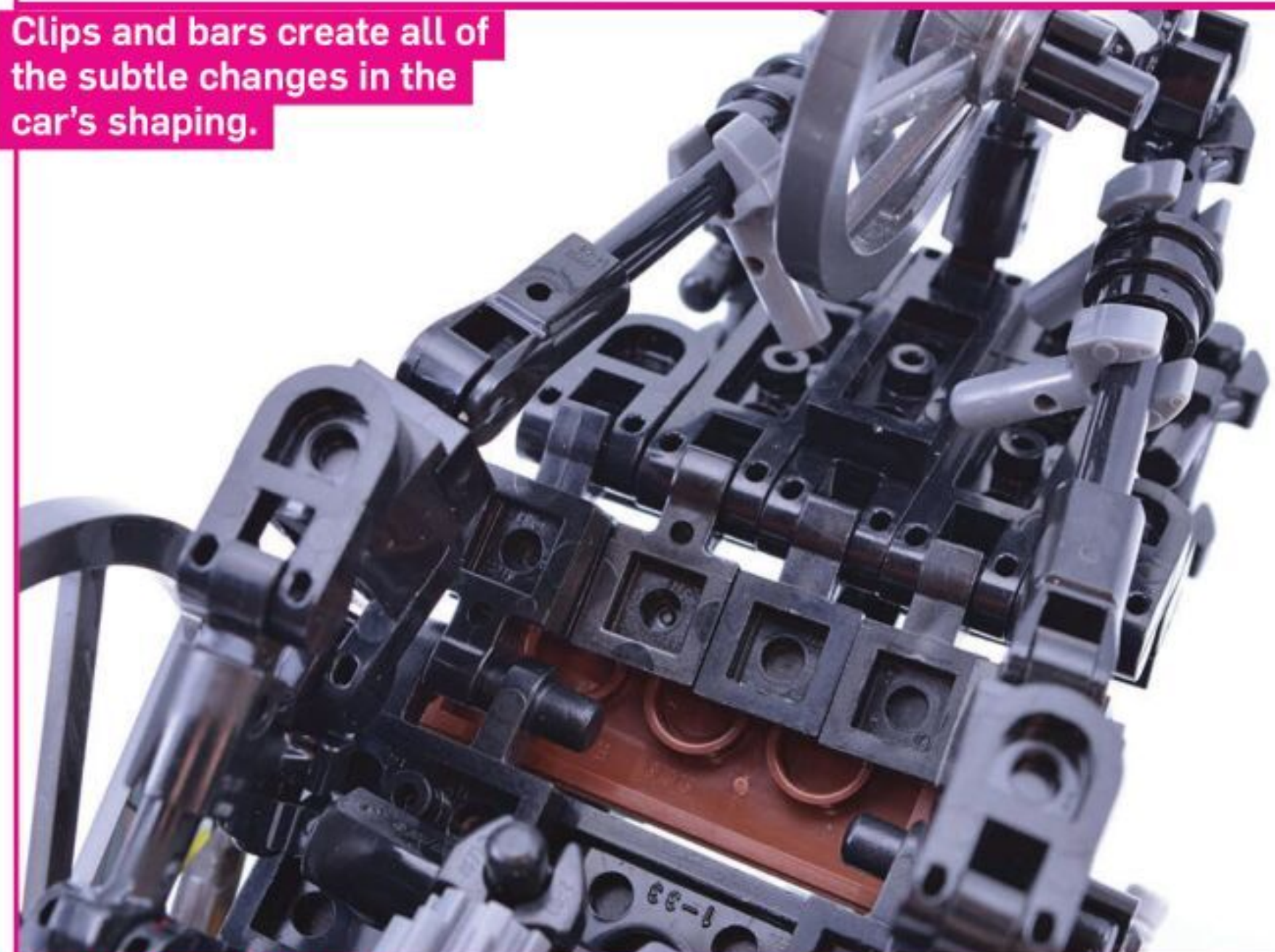
Wheel size often dictates the best scale for a car design.



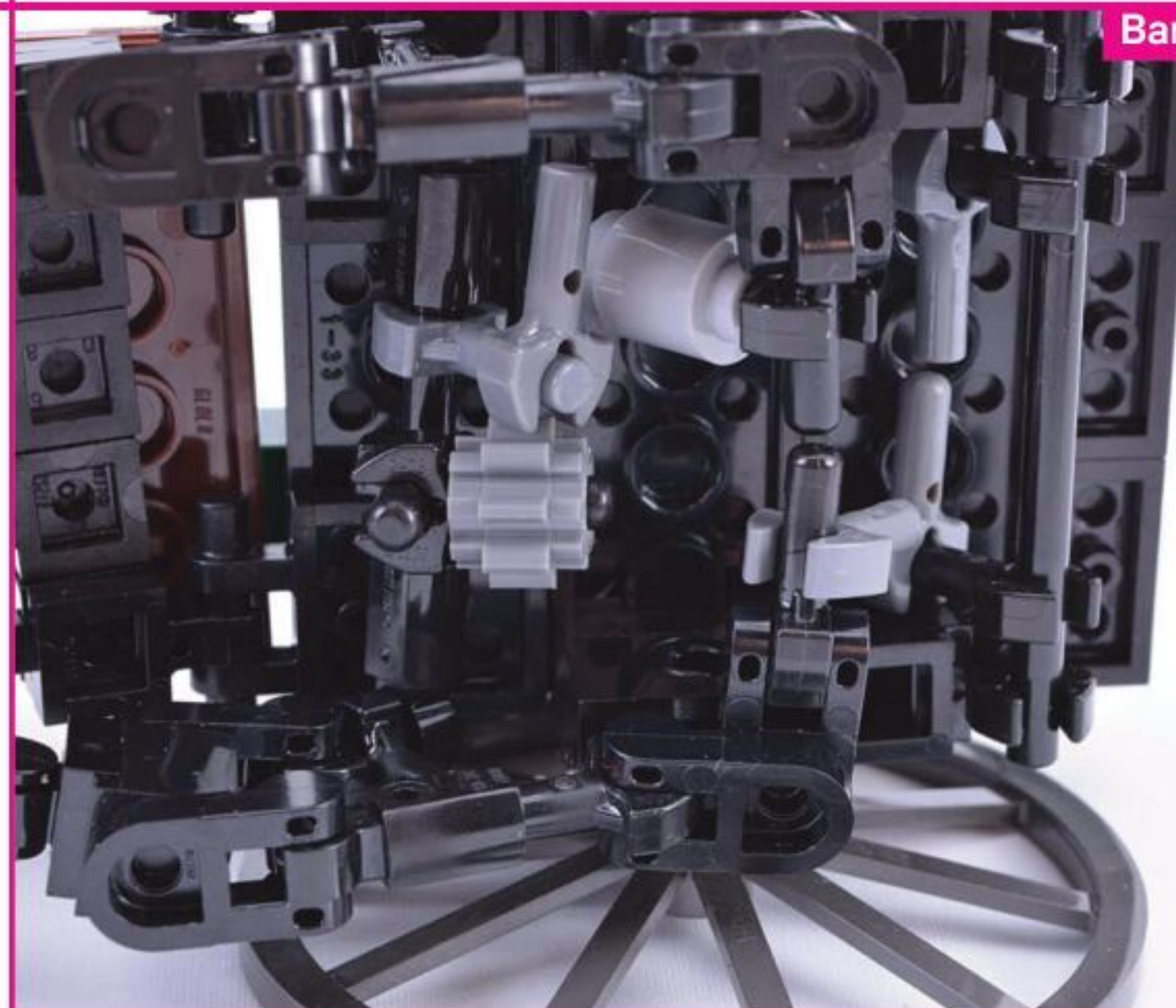
Brick-built axles increased the accuracy of the model.



Clips and bars create all of the subtle changes in the car's shaping.



Bars also enable more intricate detailing and texture.



Parts with multiple connection points are invaluable.



The completed build.





Name: Joe Lam  
Flickr: Dad's Bricks

# MINIFIGURE FEATHERED WING

Joe Lam upgrades the brick sketch philosophy with this stunning tiger creation.

Words: Simon Pickard Pics: Joe Lam

**IT IS HARD** to quantify how hard this creation is to pull off effectively. The key is the subtle texturing that Joe has implemented to make the whiteness of the creation pop out properly. This is where the feathered wing comes to the forefront.

Joe has used the wing in combination with the white plume feathers. While the black lines and the curved feline shaping stand out initially, the texture these feathered wings provide works so well. He has carefully used the wings in different orientations to ensure the roundness of the head shape is properly maintained. The rest of the texturing for the fur is accomplished using wedge tiles and exposed portions of studs. Had Joe overused the feather wing element then the

## THE TEXTURE THESE FEATHERED WINGS PROVIDE WORKS SO WELL

head would have lost this important definition.

The face itself utilises lovely hidden touches too. The tiger's chin might just be the best use of the quarter dome pieces ever. There is the wonderful appearance of black sausages in the whiskers too. The subtly angled ears are another touch that should not go unnoticed either.

It's also easy to overlook the framing of the creature, with the interesting rockwork, that helps give the tiger the sense that it is indeed walking down and out of the picture. But this only works when the outline is sculpted this well. The curved slopes and wedge pieces make it feel as though you can see the whole body of the tiger despite being it being an almost two dimensional construction. ■





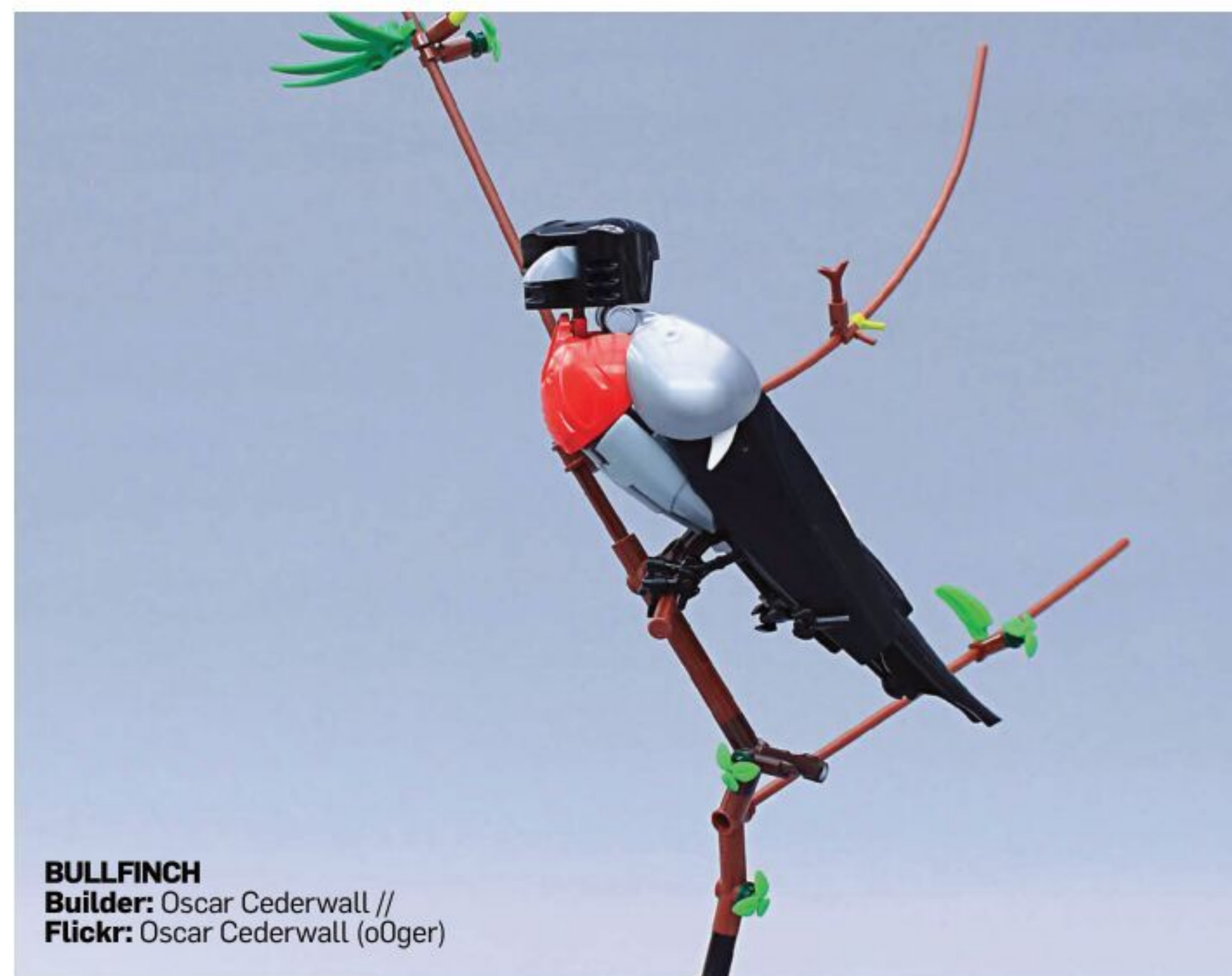
# BLOCKS MOCS // BIOCUP22

The latest selection of MOCs that have caught the attention of the Blocks team

**PEPPER PEACOCKS**  
Builder: Seth Peacock // Flickr: Obsessionist



**BULLFINCH**  
Builder: Oscar Cederwall // Flickr: Oscar Cederwall (o0ger)



**TYTO, GUARDIAN SPIRIT OF THE WOODS**  
Builder: Josh Woodyard // Flickr: Jayfa



**ANTARCTIC MONKEY RANGER**  
Builder: Sandro Quattrini // Flickr: Sandro Quattrini



**MAMA**  
Builder: Ryan Zacharias // Flickr: Ryan Z.





# MOC&A // FRIGID PHYRESIS

Ezreel intended to build an animal, but pivoted to an ice flower during the creative process

**Word:** Graham Hancock **Pics:** Ezreel Toh

**EACH YEAR THE** construction community on Flickr celebrates their creativity with the BioCup, with a theme selected to inspire participants. For 2022 the theme was nature, providing Ezreel Toh with a jumping off point for this beautiful ice flower.

## **Blocks: What was the inspiration behind the build?**

**Ezreel:** Nothing specific. The idea started off with the intention of making some kind of ice wolf/fox build, using the dinosaur tails in white and light blue crystals to showcase the tails and ice effects. However, I realised it was too complex but still wanted to use that compilation of tails as something. The crystals looked like small budding flowers, so I decided to repurpose it to make an ice flower build.

## **What are some of the interesting pieces you have used within?**

This build was made for the 2022 BioCup, which is a community-held event by the construction community, and thus we need to build with primarily construction (CCBS, Bionicle, Technic, etc) pieces. The most fun and interesting pieces to use in this build were the Metus Ice Shields at the base of the plant, and the Strakk armour used to make up the petals of the flower. I also enjoyed using the Strakk and Metus masks to insinuate the idea of frosted leaves and covering the connection points of the dinosaur tails.

## **What was the most challenging part of building this MOC?**

The part I probably had the most difficulty with is the main flower itself. It was pretty challenging to get the design to look good without feeling too gappy. Since the Strakk armour is so uniquely shaped, getting the centre of the flower to not look weird was also a challenge, and in some regards I'd say it still does look weird as a finished product. It was also quite tedious to get the Strakk and Metus masks to stay in the proper positions, since they're not actually connected to the MOC in any way, but it was less of a hassle than the flower itself.

**FRIGID PHYRESIS**  
**Builder:** Ezreel Toh // **Instagram:** ezreel\_thebluemoonmocist





# MOC&A // THE FLYING DUTCHMAN

A tricky element was the starting point for Josiah Durand's spooky ghost ship

**Word:** Graham Hancock **Pics:** Josiah Durand

The Flying Dutchman can never make port.



**THE FLYING DUTCHMAN**  
**Builder:** Josiah Durand // **Flickr:** W. Navarre



One of the cannons is firing.



**ONE OF THE** LEGO community's online challenges is Iron Builder, a contest that sees builders compete head-to-head. Josiah Durand was competing in an Iron Builder round in which he needed to use a very specific seed part – and managed to turn it into cannons in a rendition of the legendary Flying Dutchman.

#### Blocks: What sparked this build?

**Josiah:** Well, I was in the middle of my Iron Builder round, using the seed part 'Hand Large Minifigure, Left and Right Item No: 10127 and 10126' in bright green, and I wanted to use just the round part of the piece that looks like a Technic pin. I thought quickly of cannons, since I like building pirate ships. Well, the piece was green, so it wouldn't work for a cannon unless the ship was all green, so I thought of the Flying Dutchman! I considered doing the one from SpongeBob, but then I always like realistic models better, so I decided to make a ghostly Flying Dutchman instead, hopefully with a very realistic look.

#### What techniques or part uses do you feel work really well in this build?

It was really hard to incorporate the seed part, with its bulky hand on the inside of the ship. In the end I had to just tuck them in, instead of actually attaching the piece at all. I like the use of the LEGO strings for the rigging, although it may not be highly accurate to real ships it looks that way to the casual viewer. Although the spars were all quite tricky to attach, and the deck has a lot of detail like bars

to make narrower steps, I think there are three more details I really want to point out. One is the little anchor, which is a grey hook, and I connected it with a dark grey cutlass that in turn was tucked under the railing of the ship, giving it a nice angle. Second is the lantern, where I pushed a 1x1 round tile in black in between

the bar and the lantern giving my fingers come pain – I don't think I'll be taking that piece back out again! I also like the use of a transparent green hook attached by a rubber band to the NINJAGO sword skull piece in white for a ghostly figurehead.

#### Were there any particular challenges when building it?

I mentioned using the seed part, but another challenge was making sure the ropes were as taut as I wanted them. I even adjusted the height of the mast to accommodate the strings. Some parts of the masts are built upside down and others are built right side up. It was also very delicate in the end, due to the seed part leaving very few connection points between the sections.

#### What are you happiest with about the finished MOC?

It ended up being quite manageable, in spite of the delicacy. I like the colours, obviously built and imagined around the green seed part, and in the end it's just got a touch of the ghostly and sinister; it looks especially looked good in real life. I also love the rigging, which, by using all the strings I have, turned out very detailed and complete, although in the end not thoroughly accurate. I think my favourite thing overall is the detailed microscale deck! I've never built a better one at this scale, since the insides often make the top compromised, but in this case it worked out, by just building the deck and then setting it around the masts without actually attaching it at all. ■

The choice of colours conveys the ship's ghostly nature.





# CELEBRATING STAR WARS

Fans gathered in Anaheim to share their love of the epic saga and get a glimpse at what is coming next from LEGO Star Wars

**Words:** Graham Hancock **Pics:** April Haesler

**IF THERE'S ONE** thing in common across events this year, it's the relief that communities are feeling to be back together – and that was the case in Anaheim, when Star Wars Celebration returned to California's most Disney infused city to remind fans what it means to be genuinely immersed in a galaxy far, far away. That it did so the same week in May that the original Star Wars movie was released 45 years prior added an extra special touch to the proceedings.

Fans travelled from all over the US and beyond to be at the most star-studded edition of the convention so far. As ever, there was an incredible showing of attendees wearing inventive costumes along with autograph hunters, collectors, bookworms and trivia buffs. Whatever type of Star Wars fan you were, this was your place.

Celebration Anaheim offered multiple stages packed with content, with the main stage focusing on the stars of the saga and the current slate of streaming projects. At the opening of the show, Ewan McGregor and Hayden Christensen appeared with Deborah Chow to launch the new series Obi-Wan Kenobi, even premiering the first two episodes that evening for some lucky convention-goers as well as the cast and crew.

That wasn't the only hot new streaming show to be discussed, with a

trailer for Andor shared by Rogue One star Diego Luna and showrunner Tony Gilroy. Set when the Rebellion is in its early stages, the series promises to include some intense action. One such sequence is depicted in 75338 Ambush on Ferrix, a LEGO set unveiled during the convention's Summer of LEGO Star Wars panel.

The 679 piece set builds two vehicles and along with Cassian Andor, the set includes Luthen Rael and Syril Karn minifigures. 'It's a very action-packed chase scene, they are being chased by Syril in this Attack Pod. It has some very cool features and functions, it can open up to reveal the interior and of course open the cockpit. It has these foldable wings and there's a turret on the top with functioning shooters,' said Design Director Jens Kronvold Frederiksen as he unveiled the model.

Jens also revealed another upcoming LEGO set, but this one from existing material rather than something yet to come. 75335 BD-1 depicts the droid from the smash-hit 2019 video game Jedi: Fallen Order. It's another delightful statue build for collectors to add to their droid line-up.

It was not just new physical building sets that the LEGO Group and Lucasfilm teams were unveiling during the panel though – there's also a new animated special on the way this year that made the summer theme

## IT'S A VERY ACTION- PACKED CHASE SCENE



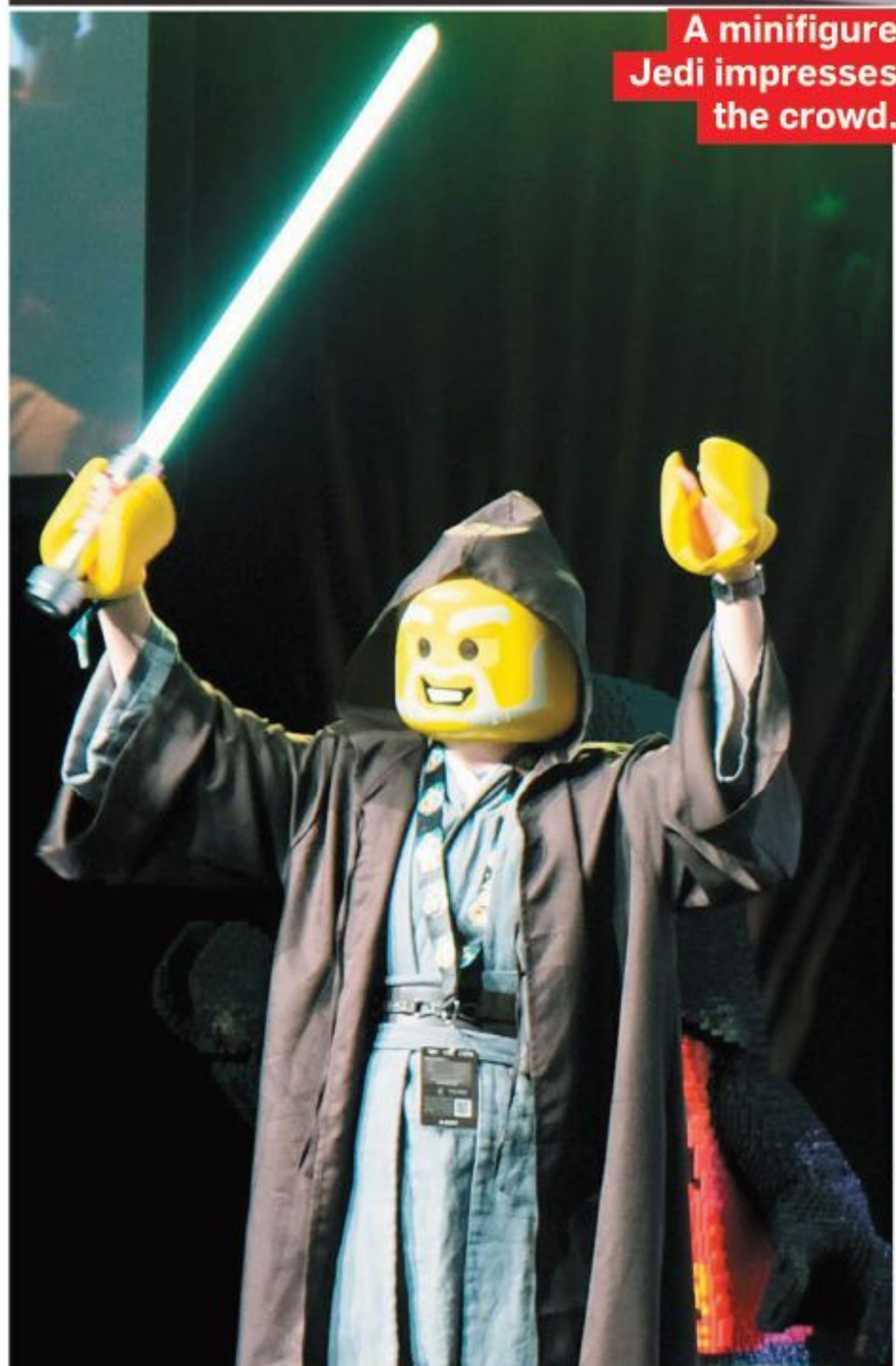




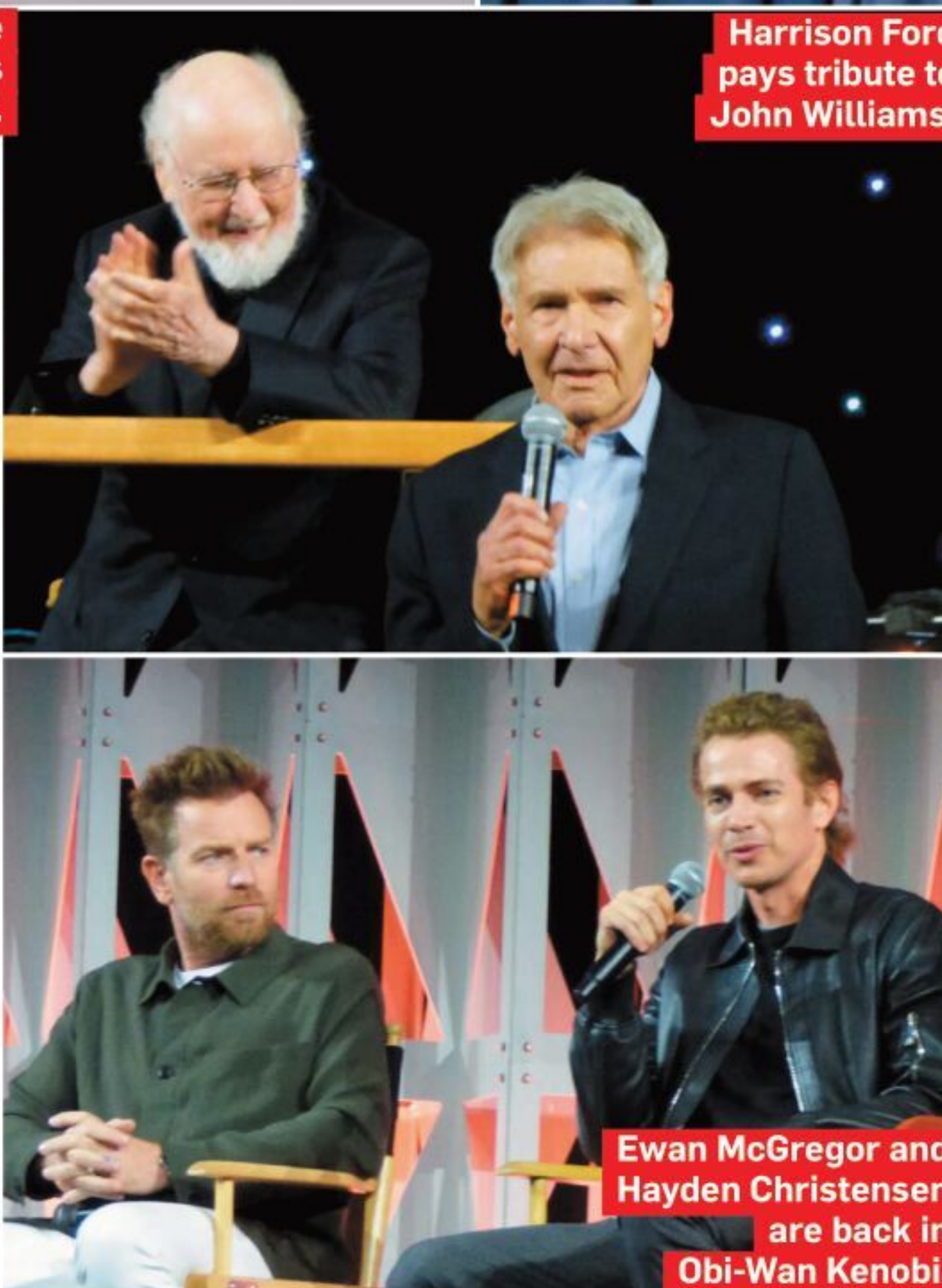
The BrickHeadz set is available to buy early at the show.



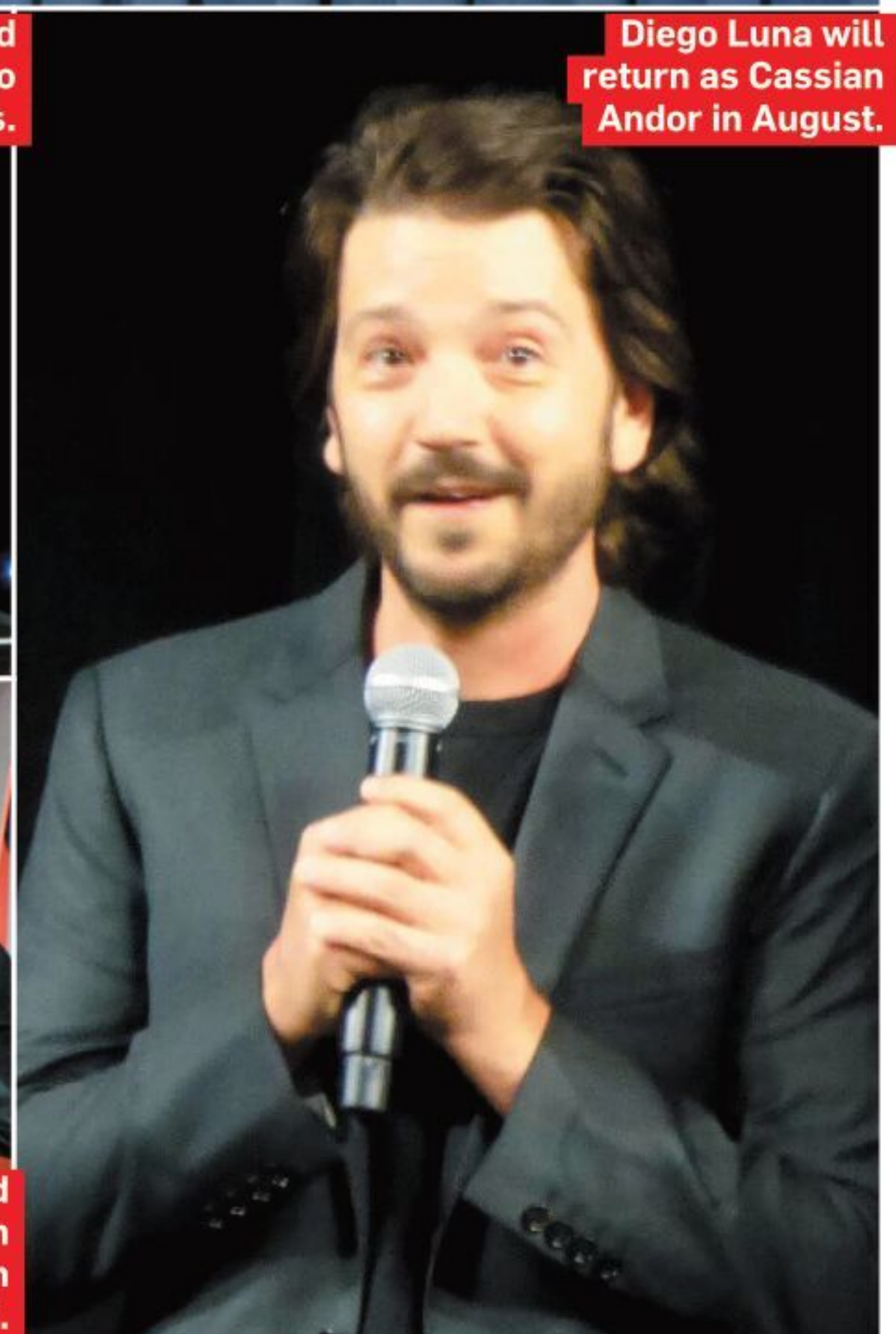
James Burns, Graham Hancock and Jeremy Becket talk LEGO Star Wars.



A minifigure Jedi impresses the crowd.



Ewan McGregor and Hayden Christensen are back in Obi-Wan Kenobi.



Diego Luna will return as Cassian Andor in August.



It's LEGO Star Wars time.

The LEGO panel announces LEGO Star Wars Summer Vacation.

These attendees got the LEGO summer party memo.

The Force is strong with this Aayla Secura cosplay.

The clan is back together.

Several activities are going on at the LEGO stand.



make sense. Finn will take the lead in LEGO Star Wars Summer Vacation, which promises to include a musical number. That news was so exciting to Keeper of the Holocron and Creative Executive Leland Chee that he regaled the audience with his own rendition of the songs from the Christmas and Halloween specials.

The one-off animated story will be streaming on Disney+ from August 5 with a huge cast, including many returning voice actors – and Weird Al Yankovic. It will feature Darth Vader ready for the vacation in his summer t-shirt – and a physical minifigure version of the character in the same outfit will be part of this year's advent calendar.

That summer vibe continued on the huge LEGO stand that was in the main hall. A special photo op was in place, in which an oversized, brick-built summer Vader was set up playing beach volleyball with the Force – there was space opposite the Dark Lord for fans to step in and get a fun snap. On the Thursday, fans could even contribute to

## LEGO STAR WARS SUMMER VACATION PROMISES TO INCLUDE A MUSICAL NUMBER

the build by tiling a plate then adding it to the scene.

In addition to the summery scene, the LEGO stand featured products on display, including the newly announced Andor model and BD-1. There were also poster mosaics for current and recent streaming series, spots for attendees to get hands-on with some bricks and games consoles set up with LEGO Star Wars: The Skywalker Saga. A little stage was home to fun build challenges and designer Q&A sessions throughout the four days.

A favourite from previous events was there too – the minifigure display, which features every single minifigure, droid and moulded creature that has been part of the theme up until this point.

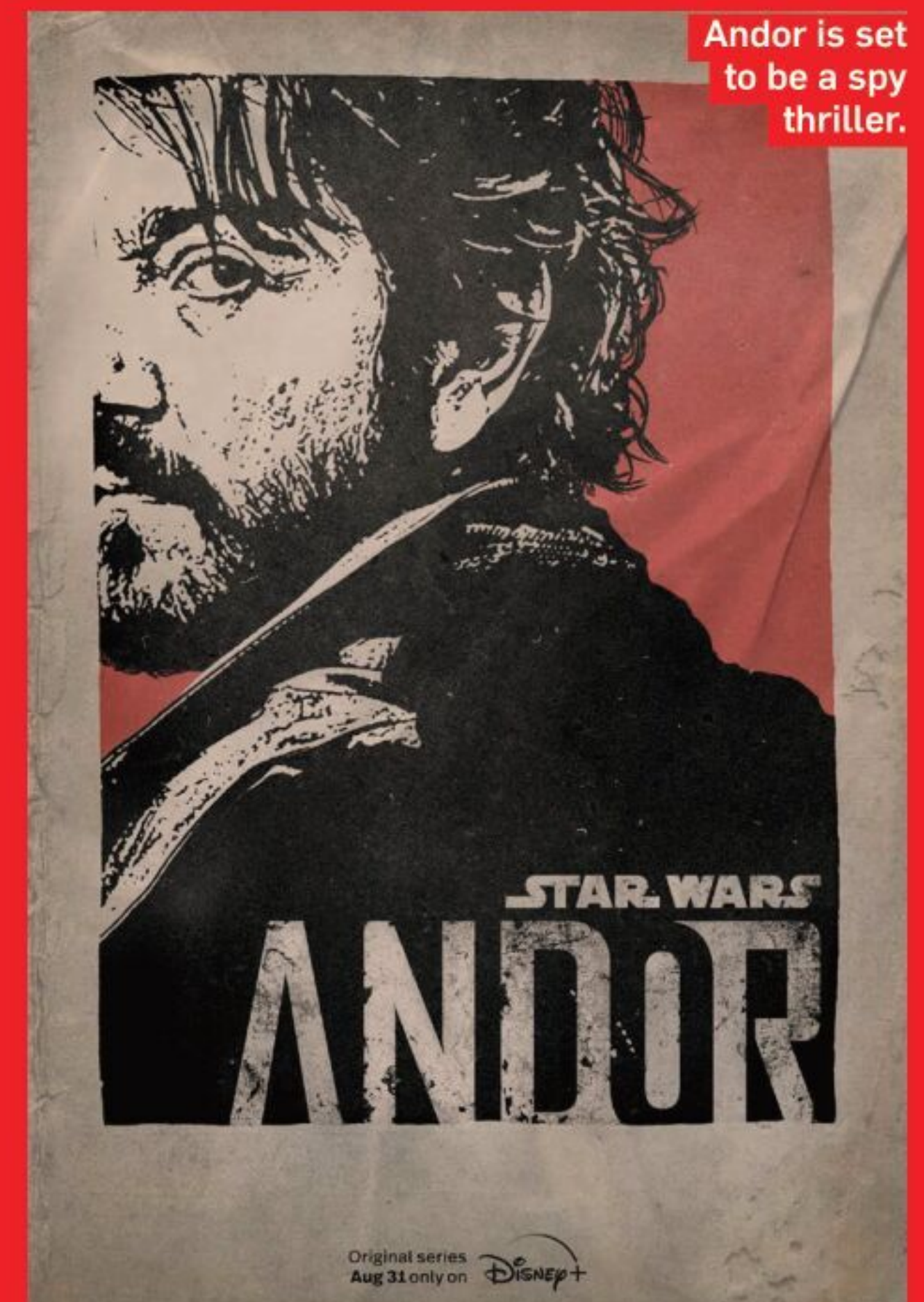
Rather than offering an exclusive set for the event, the LEGO Group brought an early batch of BrickHeadz 40451 Obi-Wan Kenobi & Darth Vader, inspired by the new series, for collectors to purchase ahead of its regular release. Other regular items were also available to purchase from the LEGO stand (with some even getting the rare, retired Shadow ARF Trooper polybag for free), but the more adventurous could explore the



The Empire keeps an eye on Celebration.

## STAR WARS: WHAT'S NEXT

There's a lot of Star Wars storytelling coming at fans over the next two years, with Celebration teasing plenty of upcoming projects



### ANDOR

**LAUNCH DATE: AUGUST 31, 2022**

Set during the dark times, the first season of the new Disney+ show will follow Cassian Andor as he is pulled into the rebellion against the Empire. A subsequent season will continue the story over a further four years, leading right up to Rogue One: A Star Wars Story.

### BAD BATCH SEASON 2

**LAUNCH DATE: SEPTEMBER 28, 2022**

A few years will have passed since Clone Force 99 saw the destruction of their home world when the characters return in Season 2. The Bad Batch will have new armour as they continue to navigate the changing galaxy in this animated series for Disney+.

### TALES OF THE JEDI

**LAUNCH DATE: LATE 2022**

This anthology series will present six animated shorts focused on different Jedi characters, with Count Dooku, Qui-Gon Jinn and Ahsoka Tano set to appear. Dave Filoni will write and produce the new series.



He always cheats at volleyball.

Jens Kronvold Frederiksen unveils BD-8.

The Rancor head from The Book of Boba Fett.

LEGO treasures could be found on the dealer tables.

The real Max Rebo, one night only.

Everything's a joke to these guys.

The Dark Lord deserves a vacation..

Din's N1 Starfighter took the central spot in the Mandalorian Experience.





many vendors in the main hall to find loose and sealed sets, including some retired UCS models.

Fans could learn more about LEGO Star Wars at the Collecting Track stage, where I joined Jeremy Beckett of the Holo-Brick Archives and James Burns of Jedi News on the Sunday afternoon. The talk covered choosing a focus for your collection, how the adult offering has evolved and – to mark the 20th anniversary of the film – a look back at the Attack of the Clones sets.

Naturally that wasn't the only panel to discuss Attack of the Clones – and incredibly, it wasn't even the most star-studded one. Ewan McGregor and Hayden Christensen returned to the main stage to join actors like Anthony Daniels and Temuera Morrison as well as behind-the-scenes talent like John Knoll and Doug Chiang to reflect on the first movie ever to be shot with digital cameras.

'People said that I brought the mullet back, you know. I don't think it had ever left.'

## ■ I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF GEORGE CAN DESCRIBE WHAT HE CREATED ■

Ewan deadpanned to the delight of the crowd. More earnestly, he reflected on what George Lucas had started: 'I don't even know if George can describe what he created. He made us this world that when I was seven years old changed our lives. And we still want more stories told inside this world, because we understand it and we love it.'

John Williams has reached a milestone bigger than Episode II this year – the accomplished composer turned 90 years old in February. He surprised the audience during the convention's opening showcase with the Pacific Symphony Orchestra to play several pieces from Star Wars – and a familiar, hummable theme from another beloved Lucasfilm franchise. As the Indiana Jones theme came to a close, Harrison Ford arrived on stage to pay tribute to the maestro.

The actor also reminded the audience that his whip-cracking adventurer will return to cinema screens next year, declaring: 'I am really proud of the movie that we made. And I'll be seeing you on campus.' Whether that will mean a return to the LEGO brick for Indy is as yet unknown, but hopefully fans will be hunting down their own treasured artefacts in toy stores in 2023. ■

75338 Ambush on Ferrix was revealed at the show.



This will be in the 2022 advent calendar.



Time to chase down some studs.



The Mandalorian showrunners Dave Filoni and Jon Favreau.

### THE MANDALORIAN SEASON 3

**LAUNCH DATE: 2023**

Everyone's favourite bounty hunting duo will continue their adventures while in possession of the Darksaber. In order to make peace with his people, Din Djarin will head back to Mandalore and once again come into contact with Bo Katan, while Moff Gideon is unlikely to have forgotten about Baby 'Grogu' Yoda.

### VISIONS VOLUME 2

**LAUNCH DATE: SPRING 2023**

A batch of anime shorts made by studios all over the world will interpret Star Wars in new ways once again. Nothing has been revealed about the content of the shorts, which will debut on Disney+ next year.

### JEDI: SURVIVOR

**LAUNCH DATE: 2023**

The sequel to Jedi: Fallen Order will see gamers playing as Cal Kestis, the Force-user who survived Order 66 and was discovered by the Inquisitors. In this game he is seemingly making a deal with an Imperial senator as well as discovering a mysterious figure in a bacta tank.

### AHSOKA

**LAUNCH DATE: 2023**

Continuing in The Mandalorian timeframe, a teaser shown at the event reveals that former Jedi Ahsoka will reacquire herself with Hera Syndulla from Star Wars: Rebels. It looks like this new live action streaming series will see Ahsoka looking for Ezra Bridger, as teased in that animated show's epilogue.

### SKELETON CREW

**LAUNCH DATE: 2023**

Jon Watts, director of the recent Spider-Man movies, is working with Christopher Ford, co-writer of Spider-Man: Homecoming, on a new series that will follow a group of young characters who making their way through the galaxy far, far away. 'It's the story of their journey trying to find their way home,' said the director. Jude Law will star in the streaming series along with four child actors.



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Subscribe to Blocks magazine today to be in with a chance of winning **LEGO Transformers 10302 Optimus Prime**. You'll also be automatically entered into our monthly prize draws to win the latest and greatest LEGO sets. See **page 77** now!



Issue 93 Blocks 103



# REWIND

## EXO-FORCE

In the early 21st century, the LEGO Group embraced anime for a theme like no other

**Words:** Chris Wharfe **Pics:** The LEGO Group, Daniel Konstanski

**LONG BEFORE NINJAGO** seized the crown for the most mech-dominated LEGO line (a title recently contested by Marvel, of all themes), there was Exo-Force. Inspired by anime and manga and anchored around a core narrative, Exo-Force blazed a trail for the LEGO Group's approach to its 'big bang' themes for more than a decade to come, encompassing three years of sets, multiple story books and dozens of issues of an online comic series.

It also came off the back of one of the most tumultuous times in LEGO history, when the company had teetered back from the brink of bankruptcy to safer ground. That peek into the abyss had been enough to persuade it to turn its attentions to pop culture for inspiration for its own themes – not just licensed partnerships – at a time when shows like Pokémon, Dragon Ball Z and Yu-Gi-Oh were firmly in the zeitgeist.

The result was an early and deliberate attempt to cater to both the traditional LEGO audience and older fans through a single theme – one that primarily revolved around enormous, glorious battle machines and minifigures like fans had never seen before, sporting spiky rubber hair pieces and face prints that aped Japanese anime. The central story of Exo-Force's first wave of sets revolved around Sentai Mountain, on which

humans and robots lived peacefully – until the robots rebelled, driving the theme's conflict.

In hindsight, there were some pretty dark themes underpinning that narrative; the robots were originally created as mechanical mine workers (erm, slaves?), before rising up under the leadership of Meca One – the gold robot, of course – to seize the means of production. Or overthrow the humans, at least. Across Exo-Force's subsequent waves, the human characters would leave Sentai Mountain to find the Golden City, then head deep into the jungle to rescue their captured leader, Sensei Keiken.

They pulled it off, but the ultimate fate of the robots was never revealed. Two and a half years into its lifespan, the LEGO Group pulled the plug on Exo-Force, citing disappointing sales in its second year on shelves that not even 'an expensive marketing campaign' could salvage. Its story continues to this day in fan fiction online – a budding cult following has emerged in the years since its cancellation – but the theme's wider legacy can be clearly felt in big bang themes like NINJAGO and NEXO KNIGHTS, and more pertinently in just how many mechs you'll encounter on any given trip to the LEGO Store.







## MEMORY LANE

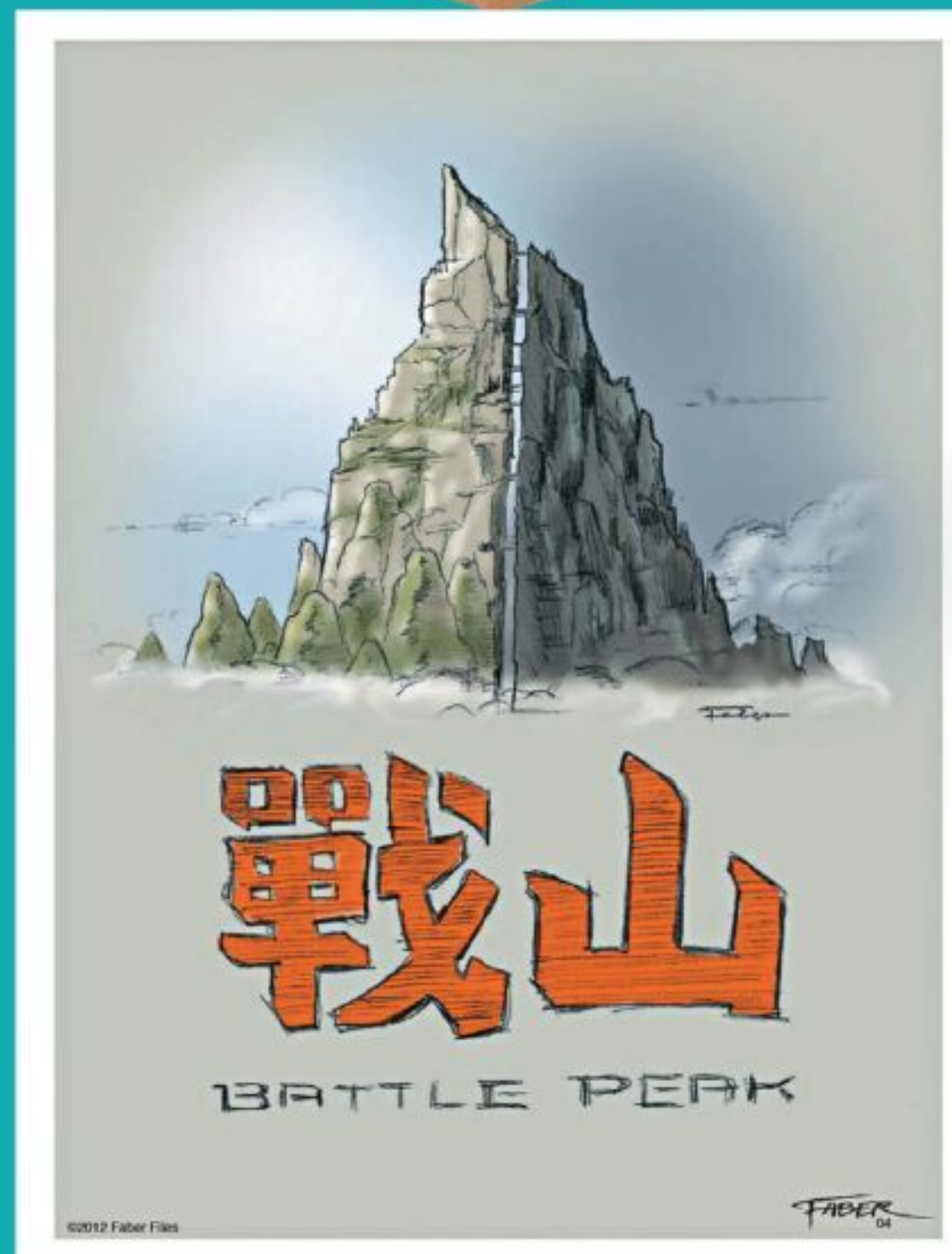
'7709 SENTAI FORTRESS ELUDED ME ALL ALONG'

### EXO-FORCE DID FOR CHRIS IN 2006 WHAT NINJAGO AND MARVEL DO FOR CHILDREN TODAY

One of the LEGO Group's biggest challenges today is keeping kids hooked on the brick as they enter their teens and age beyond the brick's typical target audience. It faced no such challenge with me in 2006, because I had Exo-Force. Knowing how much those mechs appealed to me at 13 years old, I've never really been surprised at how mech-mad the product line has become, across themes like NINJAGO, Marvel and Creator.

I did have other interests as a teenager, of course, so I didn't blow all of what little money I had on Exo-Force. But the relatively cheap sets that comprised the theme made it easy to just dip my toes in at first, with the likes of 7708 Uplink and 7711 Sentry, before setting my sights on bigger and better builds. 7709 Sentai Fortress eluded me all along, but I distinctly remember finding 7713 Bridge Walker and White Lightning at a Woolworths (remember those?) for half price in 2007. Bargain of the century, I reckon.

## BREAKING DOWN THE THEME



■ Exo-Force's working title was Battle Peak. The final name was the right choice.

■ From 2007 onwards, Exo-Force sets included 'exo-codes', which were printed on 1x2 tiles and could be used to unlock bonus content at LEGO.com.

■ The theme's original motto was 'Time to Power Up!'. Its relevance isn't clear.



## MEMORY LANE

'THEY WERE AS AWESOME AS I HAD ENVISIONED'

### DANIEL CAME TO EXO-FORCE LATE, BUT IT WAS ABSOLUTELY WORTH THE WAIT

Exo-Force debuted the same year I got married. I was just beginning my AFOL journey, which – thanks to being newlyweds with no money – consisted mostly of walking through the LEGO aisle when doing the weekly grocery run at Wal\*Mart. Even so, Exo-Force immediately caught my eye. Here was something radically different from the LEGO sets I had grown up with. The massive robots, stylised box art and focus on conflict all stood out. Curiosity got the better of me and I ended up discovering the online comics released alongside the sets during their run and reading them all.

Years later, when we were on a better financial footing, I went back and bought several collections of Exo-Force on eBay. The builds were as awesome as I had envisioned back in the mid-2000s, albeit a little more fragile, as the theme was full of things the LEGO Group's designers were trying for the first time.

## BY THE NUMBERS YEARS ACTIVE:

**2006 - 2008**

**31**

TOTAL NUMBER OF EXO-FORCE SETS

**8**

TOTAL NUMBER OF EXO-FORCE POLYBAGS

**30**

UNIQUE SINGLE-PILOT MECHS ACROSS THE ENTIRE THEME

**£69.99**

PRICE OF THE THEME'S MOST EXPENSIVE SET, 7709 SENTAI FORTRESS

**6**

NAMED HERO CHARACTERS



# REVIEW

**Aftermarket price:** £22 new, £7 used / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 69

## 7708 UPLINK

**THE ORIGINAL WAVE** of Exo-Force sets included two pocket money-priced mechs in 7708 Uplink and 7711 Sentry, and while the latter was the cheapest way to get your hands on the new robot minifigure, it was all about Uplink's bright orange mech in 2006. A surprisingly small number of orange elements do the heavy lifting here – there are just six in total, plus some printing on the sloped feet – but it's hard to argue with the articulation, firepower and part selection on offer at such a small scale.

Retailing for just £3.99 when first on shelves, 7708 Uplink served as the kind of cheap but satisfying entry point into Exo-Force that you just don't see in modern themes.

A vibrant, compelling mini mech.



**Aftermarket price:** £59 new, £17 used / **Minifigures:** 1 / **Pieces:** 177

## 7703 FIRE VULTURE

**WHILE EXO-FORCE'S MECHS** would eventually grow in size and ambition, the first handful to arrive on shelves stuck rigidly to a template that allowed them to be sold for just £9.99 apiece (it's hard to overstate just how well-priced LEGO sets were in the mid-2000s.) Among those initial efforts was 7703 Fire Vulture, one of four individual mechs that debuted in January 2006. Unfortunately, it was probably the weakest of them all.

Built primarily for aerial superiority, a good chunk of the set's plastic is devoted to a huge, spinning turbine on its back – which leaves the rest of the mech feeling pretty skeletal and underpowered. The dark blue highlights make for an attractive colour scheme (just don't look at the back), and the glowing fibre-optic cable is still a decent gimmick today, but a couple of wedge bricks and an unyielding claw hand aren't really enough to communicate the 'vulture' motif.

You did get an exclusive blue-tinted Devastator robot minifigure, and that flamethrower is pretty cool. But it's an early effort from the Exo-Force design team, and it shows – especially when much better mechs were right around the corner in sets like 7712 Supernova and 7713 Bridge Walker and White Lightning.

It's a tall mech considering it's only 177 pieces.



Robots were moulded in cool colours.

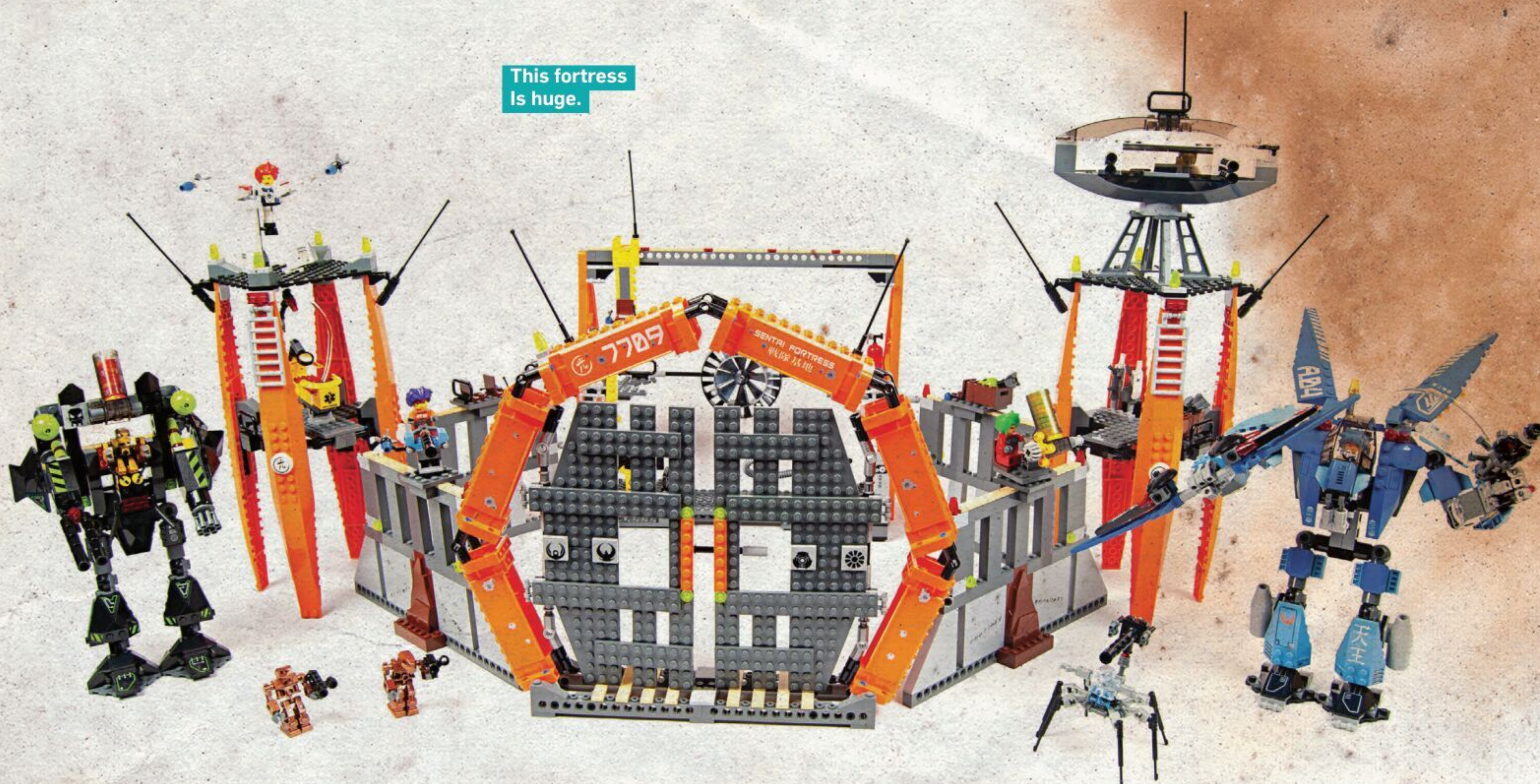




**Aftermarket price:** £257 new, £163 used / **Minifigures:** 8 / **Pieces:** 1,448

# 7709 SENTAI FORTRESS

This fortress  
is huge.



**7709 SENTAI FORTRESS** is one of the few Exo-Force sets to have dramatically risen in price on the aftermarket, and it's really not difficult to see why. An absolute steal at the time – it originally retailed for £69.99 / \$99.99 in 2006 – it's as ambitious a set as you'll find across not just the anime-inspired theme, but the LEGO Group's entire back catalogue.

Through its 1,448 pieces, 7709 Sentai Fortress includes (deep breath): a fortress with a gate, four walls and two towers; hero and villain mechs in comparable size to £10 sets like 7700 Stealth Hunter and 7701 Grand Titan; a smaller hero mech; a spider-like siege cannon; five hero minifigures, including one of only two appearances for team leader Sensei Keiken;

robot leader Meca One; and two Iron Drone minifigures.

All that came at a cost, however, and unfortunately for our heroes, it was in any sense of practicality for their fortress. While it's unbelievably huge – maddeningly so, really, for anyone trying to find space to play with it or, heaven forbid, display it – it's also seemingly come under fire several times before, which is the only logical way to explain how ridiculously open it is. Good luck defending anyone or anything in there.

Pouring most of its plastic budget into large elements is what allowed it to reach that unwieldy size, but it also (naturally) comes at the expense of stability. This is a pretty fragile

place, which isn't really what you want from a fortress. But when you're eight years old, you've got bigger concerns, like whether you can stage a huge battle between humans and drones by only buying a single set. And in 7709 Sentai Fortress, you absolutely can.

The LEGO Group's modern-day attempts to provide a battle-in-a-box – whether through Star Wars battle packs or NINJAGO fortresses – will never compare to everything that Exo-Force brought to the table in a single package in 2006. It suffered for its ambitions, for sure, but it's obvious why it's so expensive today – the sheer amount of LEGO play on offer here was unprecedented at the time, and remains unparalleled.

Five heroes  
and three  
enemies.





# RE-BUILD

## SIEGE CANNON

If the cannon in 7709 Sentai Fortress is going to do any damage, it needs to be bigger

**Words and Pics:** Daniel Konstanski

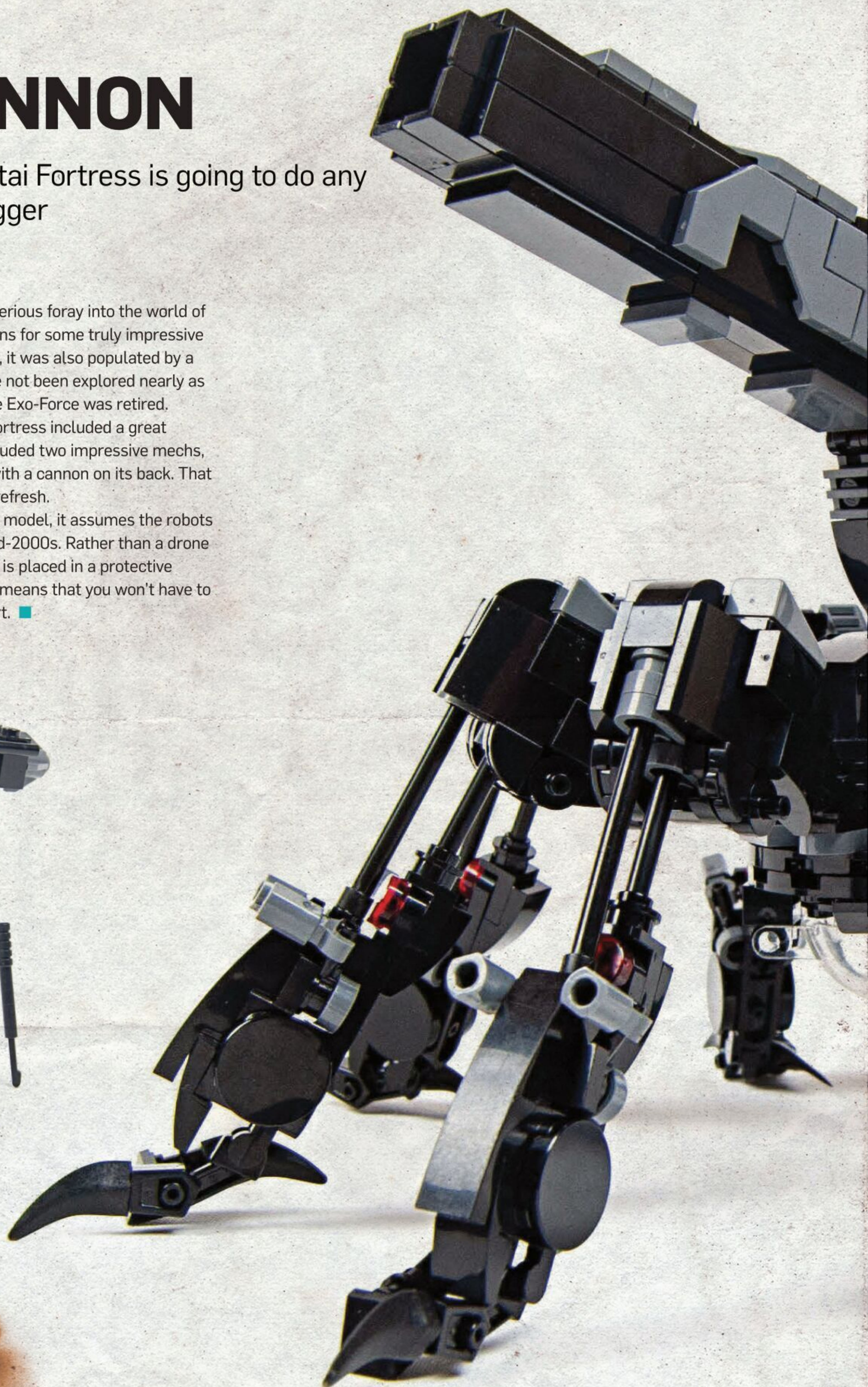
**EXO-FORCE WAS THE** LEGO Group's first serious foray into the world of brick-built mechs and provided the foundations for some truly impressive products in themes like Monkie Kid. However, it was also populated by a host of ancillary battle machines, which have not been explored nearly as thoroughly by the company in the years since Exo-Force was retired.

That made the cannon that 7709 Sentai Fortress included a great candidate for a modern upgrade. The set included two impressive mechs, but also a small spider-like battle machine with a cannon on its back. That spider cannon is the machine selected for a refresh.

Since this build is an update of the original model, it assumes the robots have advanced their technology since the mid-2000s. Rather than a drone torso to serve as the brain, a 360-degree eye is placed in a protective housing beneath the body. This conveniently means that you won't have to scrounge around for a nearly 20-year-old part. ■



The cannon from 7709 Sentai Fortress.

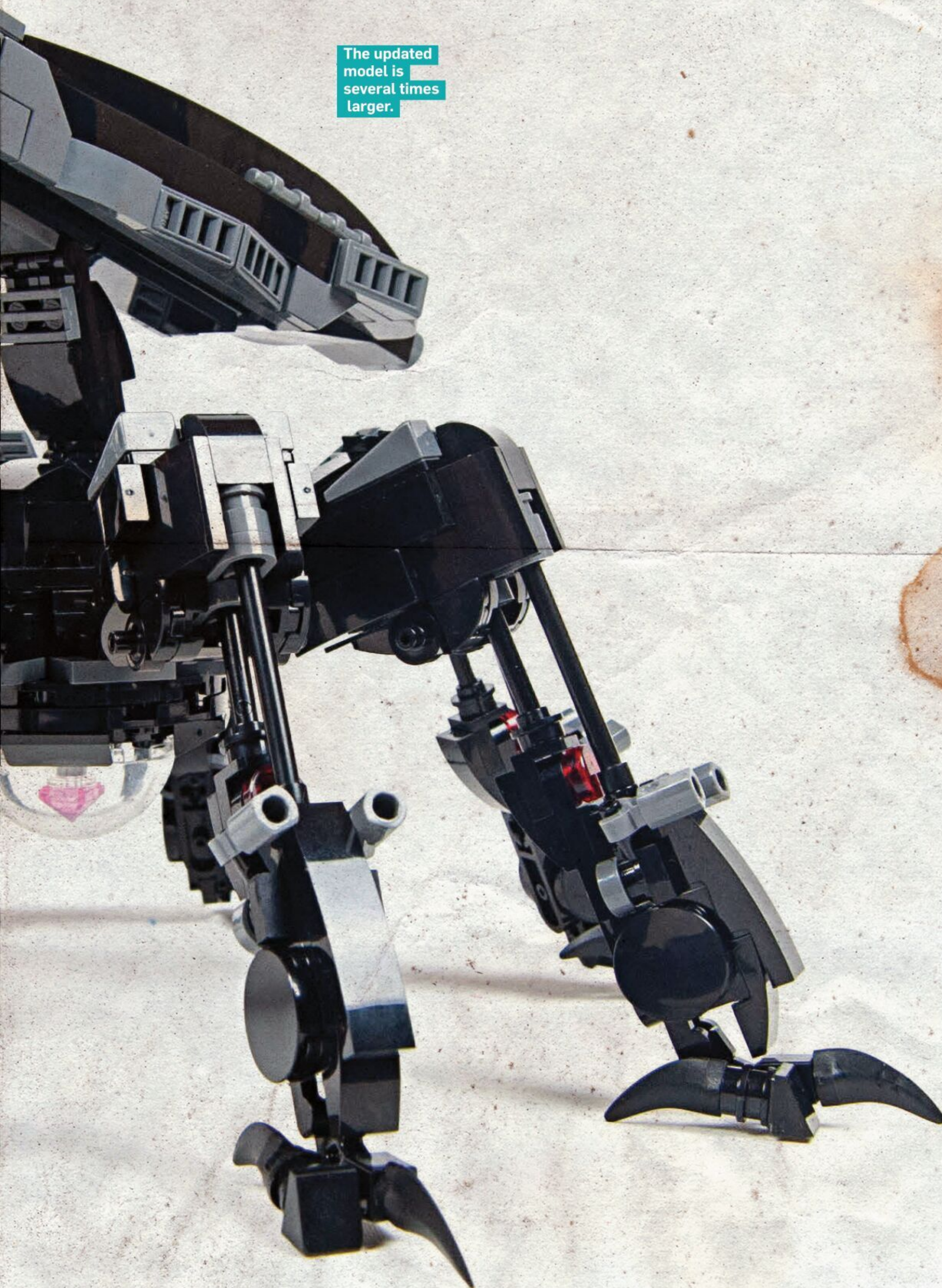




# BUILD IT

Find the step-by-step instructions at  
[blocksmag.com/blockstalgia-rebuild-exo-force](http://blocksmag.com/blockstalgia-rebuild-exo-force)

The updated  
model is  
several times  
larger.





# Blocks

# BRICKIONARY

The language of LEGO has a wide, varied and ever-growing vocabulary. Blocks magazine helps you to decode it

## A

**ABS:** Acrylonitrile butadiene styrene. The plastic most LEGO parts are made from.

**AFOL:** Adult Fan of LEGO.

## B

**Billund:** Town in Denmark where the the LEGO Group was founded and the headquarters is located.

**Bley:** Bluish grey. Refers to the current LEGO grey, compared to the old version (known as... old grey).

**BrickLink:** The online marketplace for buying and selling LEGO bricks, now owned by the LEGO Group.

**Brickset:** An online database of LEGO sets.

**Brick Train Awards:** Annual fan organised train building contest.

**BURP:** Big Ugly Rock Piece. Moulded piece five bricks high with jagged edges.

## C

**Cheese Slope:** A sloping LEGO part, named after the fact yellow pieces look like a wedge of cheese.

**Clone Brands:** Knock-off construction toys that copy aspects of, or sometimes entire, official LEGO sets.

**Custom:** A LEGO creation or individual element that uses non-LEGO parts, modified parts or accessories from third party vendors like BrickArms or BrickForge.

**Customiser:** A LEGO fan who's not afraid to modify LEGO parts. Customising may include painting, cutting, drilling, melting or adding non-LEGO parts to a creation. Considered heresy to the purist LEGO fan.

## D

**D2C:** Direct to Consumer sets. Generally exclusive to LEGO stores, with high piece counts.

**Dark Ages:** The period in a LEGO fan's life when they set aside LEGO in favour of other, non-LEGO pursuits.

**Draft:** An activity common at LEGO

club meetings in which fans each bring a LEGO set, sort out all the elements and then take turns in picking out the type of part they want. An easy way to obtain parts in large quantities without buying multiple parts of the set yourself.

## E

**Erling:** A 1x1 brick with one stud on its recessed side, named after its designer.

**Evergreen:** A theme that returns year after year, rather than only being available for one or two years.

## G

**Greeble:** Pseudo-technical detail added to a LEGO creation to enhance its appearance, often seen in LEGO Space and Mecha creations.

**GWP:** Gift with purchase. A promotional item or set obtained by spending a minimum amount at LEGO Stores or LEGO.com.

## H

**Half-Stud Offset:** A building technique that allows building without regards to standard alignment of studs on a plate, usually achieved with a jumper plate.

## I

**Ideas:** Platform for fans to upload set ideas with the potential for them to become official LEGO releases.

**Illegal:** LEGO building techniques that break the 'rules' for connections between LEGO elements used by official LEGO set designers, particularly connections that stress the LEGO elements.

**Inventory:** The list of LEGO elements included in an official LEGO set. Several LEGO fan sites host set inventories including Peeron, Brickset and BrickLink.

**IP:** Intellectual property. The LEGO Group has many IP partners, such as Disney and Nintendo.

## J

**Jumper Plate:** A 1x2 or 2x2 LEGO plate with only one stud in the centre. Useful for half-stud offset building.

## K

**KFOL:** Kid Fan of LEGO. The LEGO Group's primary target demographic of between 5-12 years.

## L

**LCP:** LEGO Certified Professional. A professional brick builder authorised by and affiliated with the LEGO Group.

**LDD:** LEGO Digital Designer. Free software for PC and Mac that lets you build LEGO models virtually.

**Legal:** LEGO building techniques that follow guidelines for official LEGO set designers.

**LEGOLAND:** Family theme parks inspired by the LEGO brand. The original location is in Billund, but now found all around the world.

**LEGO Masters:** The competitive televised building contest, with local versions airing globally.

**LEGOs:** Incorrect plural of LEGO.

**LLDC:** LEGOLAND Discovery Centre. A mini, indoor versions of the theme parks aimed specifically at children.

**LUG:** LEGO User Group. Local or regional LEGO clubs that meet and interact primarily in an offline 'real-world' context. This is changing as the number of online LUGs grows.

## M

**Microfig:** Small figures, like those in the LEGO Games series.

**Midi Scale:** Refers to sets that are between miniature and minifigure scale. They do not include minifigures but are more detailed than mini sets. So far only Star Wars sets have midi versions.

**Minifigure Scale:** A LEGO creation built for the scale of standard LEGO minifigures.

**MOC:** My Own Creation. A model designed and built by a LEGO fan without instructions. Often used as a verb, 'MOCing'.

**Mod:** A modification of an official LEGO set, usually changing part colours or





adding to original designs.

## N

**NPU:** Nice part usage. Taking a LEGO element and using it a new or unexpected way, usually different to the way it is most commonly used.

## P

**PAB:** Pick-A-Brick. Buying individual bricks in the quantities needed from the LEGO Group's online or physical stores.

**PAB Wall:** The Pick-A-Brick wall found at official LEGO stores.

**Purist:** A LEGO fan who only uses official LEGO elements. Can be applied to LEGO creations that only contain official LEGO elements with no modifications or custom parts.

## S

**S@H or SAH:** The official online store, LEGO.com. Used to be Shop at Home.

**Sigfig:** The minifigure version of a LEGO fan that is used in online communities as an avatar or 'signature minifigure'.

**SNOT:** Studs Not On Top. A building technique that places elements on their sides or even upside down to achieve a smooth surface.

## T

**TFOL:** Teen Fan of LEGO.

**TLG:** The LEGO Group, the privately held parent company for all LEGO-related brands and companies worldwide.

**TMA:** Too many acronyms.

**TRU:** Toys R Us.

## U

**UCS:** Ultimate Collector Series. A line of large LEGO Star Wars sets designed for older teens and adults.

## V

**Vignette:** A small scene recreated on a square plate, generally 8x8 studs.

## W

**WIP:** Work in progress, usually referring to a MOC.

## BASIC BRICKS

**Baseplates:** The foundation for many projects, be it houses, space bases or castles. They're normally thin plates with no connections underneath so you can only build on top. Some older sets included raised baseplates resembling rocks, hills and other landscaping.

**Bricks:** At the core of LEGO is the basic brick. They come in a wide range of sizes, usually denoted by their stud pattern – i.e. 2x2, 2x6 – and in a huge colour palette.

**Measurements:** LEGO fans usually refer to parts by the number of studs they have. For example, a brick that has two studs on the short side and four studs on the longer side would be called a 2x4 brick.

**Plates:** Thinner than bricks but not as thin as baseplates. Three plates stacked together equals the height of one standard brick. Can be joined from above or below like standard bricks.

**Printed Parts:** Can be bricks, plates or tiles. They come with printed designs, often referred to as decorated parts.

**Studs:** The fundamental joining method of basic LEGO bricks.

**Tiles:** Thin, like plates but without any studs on top (see SNOT).

■ If you can think of a widely-used LEGO term that's not in the Brictionary, drop us a line at [graham@blocksmag.com](mailto:graham@blocksmag.com) to get it included.





# LEGO EVENTS

Do you run a physical or virtual event that should be listed here? Get in touch with us via [graham@blocksmag.com](mailto:graham@blocksmag.com) and we'll add it to the list

**EVENTS ARE LIKELY TO BE CANCELLED AT SHORT NOTICE DUE TO THE ONGOING PANDEMIC, EVEN IF NOT SPECIFIED BELOW. PLEASE CHECK WITH ORGANISERS BEFORE TRAVELLING.**

## JULY 2022

### Sale Brick Show (UK)

**When:** July 9

**Where:** St Anne's Church, Sale, Greater Manchester

**What's on:** A new event for North West England. LEGO displays, marketplace and activities.

**Visit:** [facebook.com/events/344282151003841](https://facebook.com/events/344282151003841)

### Mowbray Bricks (UK)

**When:** July 9 – 10

**Where:** Mowbray School, Bedale, North Yorkshire

**What's on:** This long-running LEGO show with displays, brick pits, competitions and raffles fundraises for the school it is hosted in.

**Visit:** [facebook.com/mowbraybricks](https://facebook.com/mowbraybricks)

### Bressingham Bricks (UK)

**When:** July 9 – 10

**Where:** Bressingham Steam Railway & Gardens, Norfolk

**What's on:** Bressingham Steam Railway & Gardens hosts displays of LEGO model displays and activities.

**Visit:** [facebook.com/BressinghamSteam](https://facebook.com/BressinghamSteam)

### Brick Féile (Ireland)

**When:** July 16 – 17

**Where:** City North Hotel, Gormanston

**What's on:** Ireland's premier show for LEGO fans is organised by brick.ie, the creative team behind Ireland's most spectacular LEGO models. Fantastic LEGO creations, huge brick pits and mosaic building with Fairy Bricks.

**Visit:** [brickfeile.ie](https://brickfeile.ie)

### Oxford Brick Festival (UK)

**When:** July 23

**Where:** Northampton

**What's on:** This commercial LEGO show is new for Oxford – with LEGO models on display, activities and stores selling LEGO sets, figures and collectibles.

**Visit:** [brickfestivalevents.com](https://brickfestivalevents.com)

## AUGUST 2022

### Redhill Brick and Model Show (UK)

**When:** August 6

**Where:** Redhill, Surrey

**What's on:** A selection of LEGO displays and layouts.

**Visit:** [facebook.com/redhillbrickandmodelshow](https://facebook.com/redhillbrickandmodelshow)

### Rhyl Building Bricks (UK)

**When:** August 13

**Where:** Rhyl, North Wales

**What's on:** LEGO displays and activities at Wales' only LEGO show.

**Visit:** [facebook.com/RhylBB](https://facebook.com/RhylBB)

### Hull Brick Fest (UK)

**When:** August 13 – 14

**Where:** Guildhall

**What's on:** LEGO displays by Sheffield LUG and friends along with LEGO activities in the centre of Hull, plus specialist LEGO traders.

**Visit:** [facebook.com/SheffieldBrickFest](https://facebook.com/SheffieldBrickFest)

## SEPTEMBER 2022

### Huddersfield Brick Show (UK)

**When:** September 25

**Where:** St. Phillips Community Centre, Huddersfield

**What's on:** New for 2022, a LEGO show with activities, displays and trade stalls in Huddersfield.

**Visit:** [facebook.com/huddbrickshow](https://facebook.com/huddbrickshow)

## OCTOBER 2022

### Great Western Brick Show

**When:** October 1 – 2

**Where:** STEAM Museum, Swindon

**What's on:** This long-running LEGO show is back for 2022, with many LEGO layouts and displays, plus interactive activities.

**Visit:** [greatwesternbrickshow.com](https://greatwesternbrickshow.com)

### Bricklincs (UK)

**When:** October 8

**Where:** Christ's Hospital School, Lincoln

**What's on:** This long-running LEGO show is

back, with a day of LEGO displays, activities and a marketplace.

**Visit:** [facebook.com/BrickLincs](https://facebook.com/BrickLincs)

### Sheffield Brickfest (UK)

**When:** October 22 – 23

**Where:** High Storrs School, Sheffield

**What's on:** LEGO show in Sheffield featuring models, marketplace and activities.

**Visit:** [sheffieldlug.org](https://sheffieldlug.org)

### Milton Keynes Brick Festival (UK)

**When:** October 29

**Where:** The Ridgeway Centre, Milton Keynes

**What's on:** LEGO displays and activities along with vendors selling new sets, old sets and loose bricks.

**Visit:** [brickfestivalevents.com](https://brickfestivalevents.com)

## NOVEMBER 2022

### Shildon Brick Show (UK)

**When:** November 19 – 20

**Where:** Locomotion Museum, Shildon, County Durham

**What's on:** The UK's largest free entry LEGO show – LEGO displays from builders across the UK, activities and a marketplace.

**Visit:** [brickalleylug.co.uk/shildon](https://brickalleylug.co.uk/shildon)

### Bristol Brick Show (UK)

**When:** November 19 – 20

**Where:** Gloucestershire County Cricket Club, Bristol

**What's on:** LEGO exhibitions and activities.

**Visit:** [gertlug.co.uk/eventst](https://gertlug.co.uk/eventst)

# BRICKSMcGEE

PLAYFUL SINCE 2012



# FROM THE VAULT

It may have taken 25 years for Jurassic Park to get a LEGO set, but it was actually the franchise's forgotten movie that was the first to get the brick treatment

**Words:** Graham Hancock **Pics:** Brickset

**IT TOOK UNTIL** 2018 for the LEGO Group to release a set based on the original Jurassic Park movie, when the excellent 75932 Jurassic Park Velociraptor Chase managed to pack lots of dinosaur-induced tension into a relatively small footprint. Although it took 25 years for the most beloved movie in the franchise to get an official model, it was Jurassic Park III that first appeared in the LEGO portfolio.

Given that Jurassic Park III is the forgotten entry in the series, lacking the overall adoration that Jurassic Park enjoys or the acknowledgement for some incredible set pieces that The Lost World gets, it would be easy to assume it wouldn't have been honoured with any LEGO tie-ins. In actuality though, Jurassic Park III was released in 2001 – just when the LEGO Group was releasing Studios sets for making movies with.

A base box released in 2000 included a camera, software and a selection of bricks so that children could make stop motion movies. In 2001 though, a whole batch of accessory sets launched – the models were designed to be buildable movie sets you could use for making movies. Among the many non-licensed boxes were a selection inspired by Jurassic Park III.

Bizarrely, there were no minifigures inspired by the movie – instead, the dinosaurs were menacing Johnny Thunder and friends. What was the story there? Was an ageing Johnny Thunder making his living recreating past glories on the silver screen?

The movie characters may not have made it into the boxes, but the Spinosaurus in 1371 was pretty impressive by 2001 LEGO dino standards. It was a strange thing that only two LEGO Studios sets were marked as Jurassic World III, as several others featured dinosaurs and they would clearly work well together – for some reason though, only two released were explicitly licensed.

A big part of the tie-in would have been that 1349, the main Studios set, was a link up between the LEGO Group and Steven Spielberg. Although he didn't personally direct Jurassic Park III, he was of course heavily involved as a producer. The director minifigure in the sets bore a striking resemblance to the legendary moviemaker – so improbably, there was a LEGO Steven Spielberg long before an Alan Grant, Ellie Sattler or Ian Malcolm. ■

## 1370 Raptor Rumble.





# BLOCKS

**NEXT MONTH**  
IN SHOPS AUGUST 4

## 90TH ANNIVERSARY SET REVIEWS

Lion Knights' Castle, Galactic Explorer and Forest Hideout



### STAR WARS AT-ACT

Build an obstacle  
for Andor

### STARRY NIGHT

Recreating art  
with bricks

### MIXING MOODS

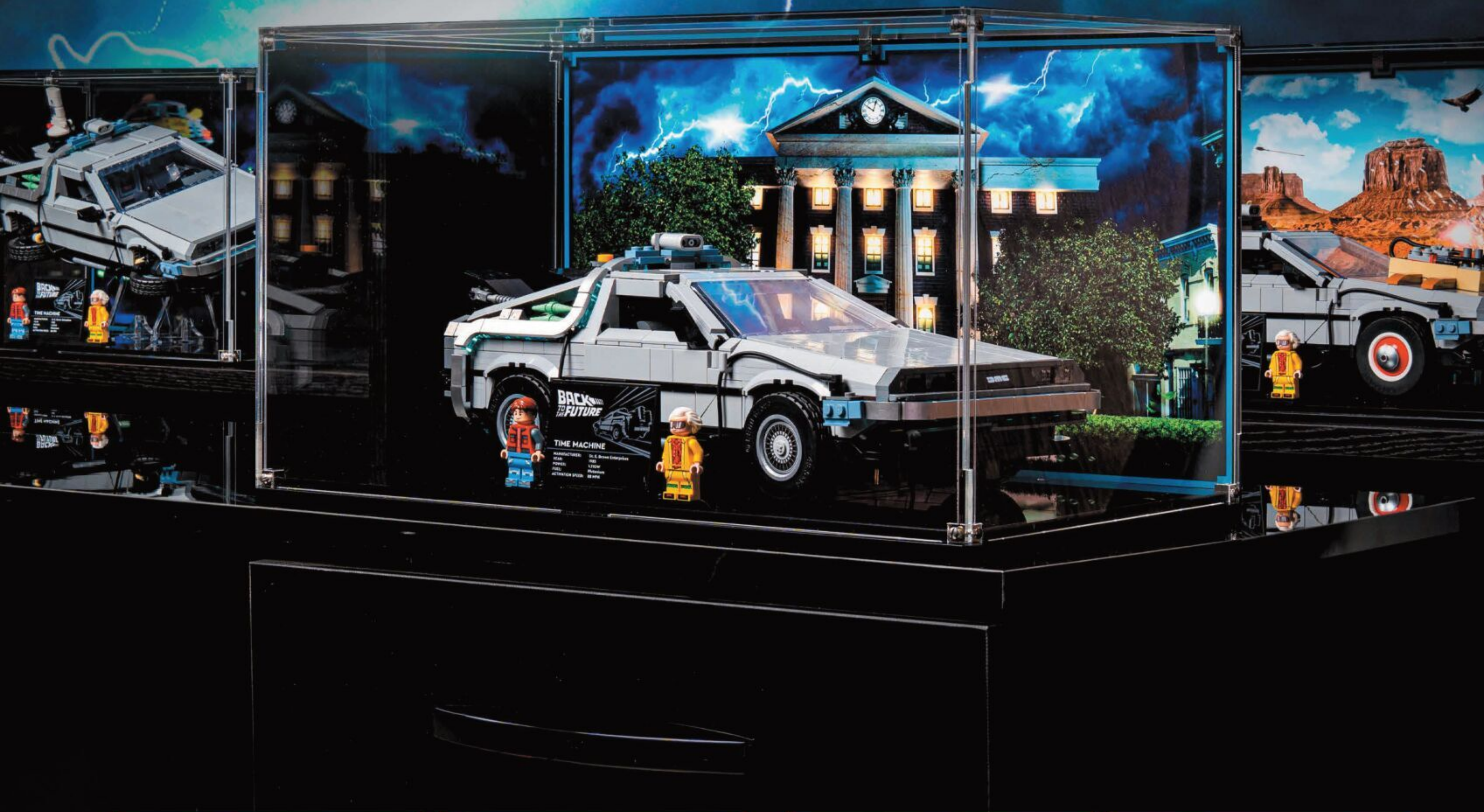
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